WHICH WAY FRANCE?

BY

ALEXANDER WERTH

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It is the fate of France to live dangerously
— JACQUES BAINVILLE

O peuple deux fois né, peuple vieux et nouveau
— ANDRÉ CHÉNIER

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To

DARSIE GILLIE

AND

THOMAS CADETT

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

ACKNOWLEDGMENT - - - - - - - 7

PREFACE - - - - - - - - 15

I NON-STOP 1919–32 - - - - - - - 21

Armistice Day. Clemenceau. 'Germany Shall Pay.' Millerand. Bolshevik Menace. Poincaré and the Ruhr. Left Election Victory of 1924. Financial Crisis of 1924-26. Herriot. Failure of Geneva Protocol. Locarno the next best thing. Poincaré saves the franc. Briand's peace policy. Three years of prosperity. End of Poincaré. Tardieu and Laval. Decline of Briand. A great Franco-German Riddle. Briand's death. Tardieu preaching *bonne humeur*.

II THE ABORTIVE FRONT POPULAIRE OF 1932 - 39

The Left Election Victory of 1932. The *Cahiers Huyghens*. Conservative Radicals and uncompromising Socialists. The Herriot Cabinet. Lausanne. American War Debts. 1933: Illusion of French Stability. Fall of Daladier Government. End of 1933: the Great Crisis of Parliamentary Government.

III THE SIXTH OF FEBRUARY AND AFTER - - 47

The Stavisky Bombshell. Anti-Parliamentary Press Campaign. Chautemps braves the storm. Royalist riots. Fall of Chautemps Government. Daladier Government. Chiappe. 6th of February. 'A Fascist plot?' Support of public opinion. Daladier's resignation. February 7: A night of anarchy. The working class reacts. Communist riot of February 9. Socialist-Communist relations. The General Strike of February 12. Doumergue.

IV PARLIAMENT BULLIED BY THE STREET – THE CROIX DE FEU - - - - - - - 64

The Doumergue Cabinet. '*Chantage de la Rue*.' The Prince Affair. Colonel de la Rocque. The success of the Croix de Feu. Their *mystique*. Their strange relations with Doumergue.

V THE DOUMERGUE–TARDIEU PLOT AGAINST THE REPUBLIC - - - - - - - - 75

Doumergue's wireless antics. His attacks on the Socialists and Communists. Devaluation scare. His Constitutional proposal. The Premier's prerogatives. 'M.

CHAPTER PAGE

Doumergue has revised the British Constitution.' The effect of the Marseilles assassinations. Reshuffle of the Cabinet. Laval becomes Foreign Minister. Blum's slashing attack on Doumergue's reforms. Analogy with MacMahon. The Radical Congress. Herriot's pledge. Intimidation of Parliament. Doumergue's Bluff called. Resignation of his Cabinet. A final threat. Armistice Day 1934. Doumergue proclaimed Fascist leader. Back to Tournefeuille. A first victory over Fascism.

VI ENTER LAVAL - - - - - - - 93

Back to more normal parliamentary Government. The Flandin Cabinet. M. Flandin. His economic theories. Laval. His policy compared with Barthou's. First meeting with Laval. Personal peculiarities. His career. League and Saar. The International Force. Flirting with Ribbentrop.

VII THE SAAR INTERLUDE - - - - - - 106

VIII BUILDING ON SAND - - - - - - 123

Laval 'a dustbin of conflicting desires'. His 'triumphant' journey to Rome. How he was bamboozled by Mussolini. Free hand in Abyssinia? The Anglo-French London *Communiqué*. The French Army. Lean recruiting years. France doubles term of military service. Blum's attack. *A bas les deux ans*. Hitler's reply: Conscription in Germany. Simon in Berlin. A comic conference. EXTRACTS FROM A STRESA DIARY. Result of Stresa. Laval signs Franco-Soviet Pact.

IX CHAMBER VERSUS BANK OF FRANCE: THE DOUBLE CABINET CRISIS OF MAY–JUNE 1935 142

Conflict between Flandin and Bank of France. Financial panic. Flandin's surrender. Advocates of devaluation. Reynaud, Mickey Mouse of the Chamber. The comic one-day cabinet of M. Fernand Bouisson. What sort of person he was. Two bald heads. Caillaux's grand entry. And quick exit. The Caillaux legend. Fall of Bouisson Government. Bank of France continues resistance. Laval forms new cabinet. Deflation. Government servants' riots.

X THE RISE OF THE FRONT POPULAIRE - - 153

After February 6. 'United Front' of August 1934. Socialist and Communist manœuvring. The Symbolic Election of M. Rivet in May 1935. Blum criticises Stalin. The Front Populaire. Negative attitude of Socialist Congress at Mulhouse. 'Everything or Nothing.' Effect of reappearance of Croix de Feu in June 1935. Laval reassures the Left. The July 14 oath. Blum, Thorez and Daladier meet. Herriot resists. An historical July 14. Apotheosis of Croix de Feu.

CHAPTER PAGE

XI FRANCE AND ABYSSINIA - - - - - - 169

Mussolini continues to blackmail France. French annoyed by Anglo-German Naval Agreement. Abyssinian savagery. Mussolini-worship. Michelangelo an agent of Mussolini. Italians bribe French Press. Hoare's Geneva speech. Home Fleet enters Mediterranean. Was Hoare sincere? The British note of October 18 'Only economic sanctions.' Hoare–Laval Plan. The British General Election a swindle?

XII THE FALL OF LAVAL - - - - - - 181

1. The Fascist 'March on Paris'

Croix de Feu's spectacular *rentrée*. Dorgères and the Peasant Front. Croix de Feu's 'lightning Mobilisations'. Red-counter demonstrations. Street battles. A Fascist *putsch*? Left Press raises a scare. 'The Army of the Trusts, the Army of Civil War.' Occupation of Paris predicted. Radical Congress. Laval's sop to the Radicals. Was he a Fascist himself? Radicals accept Front Populaire.

2. The Left and Abyssinia

British Embassy has to be protected by Gardes Mobiles. Left afraid of military sanctions. 'The whole Press against us.' Blum praises, then attacks British Government. Admits reluctantly military sanctions. André Malraux disgruntled. Herriot praises England, but asks Cot not to speak.

3. La Journée de Lamourette, The Croix de Feu 'go Tory'

Provocation on Armistice Day. Shooting affray at Limoges. Another financial panic. The Fascist Leagues debate at the Chamber. Incitement to murder in *Action Française*. Government attacks Laval. Fascist deputies apologetic. The grand reconciliation scene of December 6. Ybarnégaray, Blum and Thorez agree on dissolution of military organisations. Anti-Fascist legislation. Effect of December 6. Croix de Feu 'go Tory'. '500 candidates in General Election.'

4. Laval's Swan-Song

Laval after Hoare–Laval Plan. His failure to resign. Left protest against 'premium on aggression'. Herriot resigns from Radical Presidency. Laval 'humiliated'. Mussolini lets him down. Cot and Delbos strike out. Laval's defence of his policy, a masterpiece of insincerity. Majority of twenty. Were the ballot-papers tampered with? Radicals rebel. End of Laval Government. Laval's last thought. *Mussolini, quel salaud!*

CHAPTER PAGE

XIII FRANCE A SECOND-CLASS POWER? THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT AND HITLER'S LOCARNO COUP 210

The Sarraut Government. Sarraut's little mannerisms. Foreign kings and statesmen invade Paris. Security planning. Franco-Soviet Pact discussions. Why Laval delayed ratification. Praise of, and opposition to, the Pact. Herriot and the Red Steam-roller. *Volte-face* of the Right. Socialists' lukewarm support. Hitler interview in *Paris-Midi*: 'let us be friends.' But also a warning against ratification of Pact. The Rhineland zone. Its origin. Foch and Lloyd George. Rhineland separatism. Stresemann. '100 per cent of what we wanted.' Hitler and Franco-Soviet Pact. His speech of May 21, 1935. The coup of March 7. 'War?' 'What will England do?' Bewilderment in Paris. Mobilisation? A momentous decision. Instead of mobilisation, appeal to League Council. How Hitler tricked the French Ambassador. British public goes silly over Hitler. Herr Wagner's juridical doctrine. Germany gets away with it. Scraps of paper. A dialogue in a pigsty. A British afterthought: 'The French were damned fools.'

XIV THE ELECTION OF 1936 AND THE FRONT POPULAIRE PROGRAMME - - - - - - 231

The election issues. La Rocque's 'arbitration' and other well-meaning gibberish. THE FRONT POPULAIRE PROGRAMME. Communists and Joan of Arc. Hitler with a knife between his teeth.

XV INFORMAL NOTES ON A TOUR THROUGH VARIOUS PARTS OF FRANCE IN APRIL 1936 - - - 240

The miners of Lens. The devastated regions. Memories of war. Polish miners. M. Hordis and his pals. Croix de Feu shopkeepers. Memories of British troops. An old miner recalls Zola. A comic Socialist candidate. An English hotelkeeper and what he thought of it all. War graves. Gramophone records from the British Officers' mess. The Bourbonnais. Among the peasants of the Allier. The dog's life of a French Deputy. 'The Republic is eternal.' The passionate republicans of Evaux-les-Bains. M. Laval, the postman. Silk slump at Lyons. Herriot at the Town Hall. Herriot among the hecklers. 'I am being slandered.' A drunk's views on Doumergue. Strasbourg. A panic on March 7. Heine and Strasbourg Cathedral. Along the Maginot Line. Alsatian Dissident Communists are pro-Nazi. The meaning of Alsatian Autonomism. A revolver to frighten the French. Regionalism. The Robert Burns of Alsace. The Alsatians grumble both under Germany and under France. Nancy and the Comité des Forges. The Comité des Forges Candidate beaten by the Front Populaire. Peasants for preventive war. A visit to a Lorraine village.

CHAPTER PAGE

XVI ENTER LÉON BLUM - - - - - - - 271

The election campaign of 1936. The comic *Journal* referendum. La Rocque's last appeal. Marshal Pétain goes Croix de Feu. Election results. The life and character of Léon Blum. 'Leader of the Opposition.' Premier-elect. Blum reassures the Banks. The C.G.T. and the Communists. Blum and America. The Mur des Fédéres apotheosis. Bourgeoisie thrilled with handsome young Communist. Blum: 'I am not a Kerensky.' 'Within the framework of Capitalist Society.' The Blum Cabinet. The Great Strike starts.

XVII THE GREAT STRIKES OF JUNE 1936 - - - 292

The first stay-in strike at Issy. The first wave of strikes. The stay-in strike at Renault's: JACQUES'S FIRST STORY. The strikes spread over whole of France after Whitsun week-end. A spontaneous movement. Trotsky's irony. 350,000 strikers in Paris area. Threatened food panic. No newspapers. The *Grands Magasins*. Blum's first broadcast. At Renault's: JACQUES'S SECOND STORY. Communists overwhelmed. But both they and C.G.T. take credit for strikes. C.G.T. membership jumps to five million. Communist victory Festival. The Soviet Flag of France. Thorez proclaims New Legality.

XVIII WHAT THE WORKERS GAINED - - - - 315

Blum Government at the Chamber. 'Stay-in strikes are illegal.' The Matignon Agreement. Jouhaux: 'Working class's greatest victory.' Retrospect of French Trade Unionism. Why it was weak. How it became strong. Collective Contracts. Recognition of Trade Union rights. Holidays with pay. Forty-hour week.

XIX THE FRENCH 'NEW DEAL' - - - - 329

Policy of Deflation reversed. 'Greater purchasing-power.' Caillaux critical. Vincent Auriol goes easy. 'Baby bonds.' Period of transition. September 25: devaluation of franc. Anglo-Franco-American declaration. The Devaluation Law. Senate's bad humour. Anger over stay-in strikes.

'200 FAMILIES' AND 'MERCHANTS OF DEATH' - 339

Three important reforms. Office du Blé. Stability of Agriculture. Reform of Bank of France. Bank's political influence. Doing away with financial oligarchy. 'France's Bank.' Public credit controlled by the State. *Marchands de canons*. The moral case. France leads the way. Pierre Cot on Nationalisation of aeroplane production. 'Not only moral, but also efficient.'

XXI LA ROCQUE AND DORIOT - - - - 352

Dissolution of the Croix de Feu. Meeting with La Rocque on night of dissolution. 'A period of persecution.' The Window Plebiscite. Riots in Champs-Elysées. The

CHAPTER PAGE

army parade of July 14: a moment of national unity. The Parc des Princes riots. La Rocque's competitor: Doriot. A Communist who renounced Moscow. His programme. A trip to St. Denis. Marseilles gangsters and Paris intellectuals. '*Doriot a Berlin!*'

XXII 'AEROPLANES FOR SPAIN!' - - - - - 370

Blum's foreign policy. In May 1936 the League was in ruins. Therefore: caution and friendship with England. Delbos and 'interpretation' of Covenant. Hitler goes ahead; Austria and Danzig. Blum makes a good impression in London. The Spanish Civil war. Help for Spain? '*C'est très délicat.*' England and Delbos put on the brake. August 8. 'Non-intervention a dupes' game.' French Right supports Franco. Red atrocity stories. 'Aeroplanes for Spain!' La Pasionaria in Paris. Irun. Blum's Apologia. 'Spain a German colony?'

XXIII THE SUICIDE OF SALENGRO - - - - - 391

France's Home Secretary hounded to death. The spirit of February 6. *Gringoire* and the Chiappe gang. Stirring up hatred. Slander as an instrument of Fascist policy. The new Libel Bill.

XXIV THE EVE OF 1937 - - - - - - - 399

German expeditionary forces in Spain. Morocco in danger. Delbos's 'limits'. Communists' Abstention in Confidence Vote on Blum's foreign policy. Friction within Front Populaire. Provincial Radicals scared of Moscow. Consolidation of security in the West. French opportunism in Eastern Europe. Improved economic outlook. Two great causes of anxiety.

INDEX - - - - - - - - - 411

PREFACE

THE Versailles system has crumbled; the Locarno Treaty – the treaty of the 'Locarno spirit' – is dead; and France has begun a new life – a dangerous life in a bold and wicked new world. Not even during the first post-War years did French opinion seriously believe that the Treaty of Versailles would or could last; for the French knew that, in order to last, the Treaty was neither sufficiently soft, nor sufficiently hard. It was not tolerable to Germany as the Treaty of Vienna had been tolerable to France; but, to use Bainville's phrase, it had, while robbing Germany of everything, left her the most precious thing of all – the power of political recuperation. In other words, it had not broken, but strengthened German unity. Except for one belated and half-hearted attempt to shake this unity by encouraging Rhineland Separatism at the time of the Ruhr occupation in 1923, France accepted with much resignation the thought that Germany would continue to exist as a great single Power; and the policy of Briand consisted precisely in 'making the best of it'. He knew that the Versailles system could not be eternal, and he prepared the transition to a new system – the system of the League. He was blamed by his critics for hastening this process; and Tardieu in 1930–2 was the last who attempted to slow it down; though even he could not have thought that Versailles would last forever.

The transition was to be effected 'within the framework of the League'. Much of the Versailles system was voluntarily, if often reluctantly, dismantled by the French themselves – the Rhine occupation went, reparations went, and the principle of inequality, the basis of the Versailles Treaty, went, even before Hitler had come into power. But then, in 1935 and 1936, what remained of Versailles was demolished by Germany – no longer through any League or legal procedure, but through plain treaty violation.

First she tore up the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles and then, Articles 41, 42 and 43, and, with them, the Treaty of Locarno. The League system, on which the new Europe was to be built, presupposes the sanctity of Treaty obligations. Germany's action, prompted by the Nazi maxim '*Recht ist was Deutschland nützt*' – the new version of 'might is right' – showed that treaty obligations counted for nothing, as far as she was concerned.

It was the same with Italy who, in launching upon her Abyssinian war, broke four treaties all at once. In condoning Mussolini's action, Laval helped still further to weaken the authority of the League; and Britain, in condoning Germany's violation of Locarno, acted little better than Laval. The 'Scrap of Paper' policy is inevitably contagious; for if one party refuses to respect the rules of the game, the others are inevitably duped when they try to observe them. By relying on the word of Italy and Germany in the case of non-intervention in Spain the Blum Government learned a bitter lesson.

The League, which was to have built up a new European order, is now in ruins. Until 1935, it had suffered many setbacks; but it remained a hope; and in 1934 and 1935 there were moments when it looked as though it might become not only a hope, but a reality – a means of creating a new order now that Versailles was gone. But this hope was shattered by the failure of sanctions against Italy and by Hitler's successful repudiation of Locarno – the most glaring manifestation of the New Disorder, and one which in one day shattered the hope of achieving Collective Security in Europe, and reduced France to what some pessimists have called the position of a second-class Power. For by replacing, in her case, a strategically strong position on the Rhine by a strategically weak one and by increasing enormously the difficulty of French armed intervention in the Rhineland in the event of a German attack in the East, the repudiation of Locarno struck a shattering blow not only at 'collective security' and 'indivisible peace', but at France's alliances with Eastern European States as well. The fall of Titulescu in September was a significant symptom of the loss of faith in the League and in the League's and in France's ability to prevent aggression in Eastern Europe.

This is the lawless Europe which France – who built up her whole policy for years on the 'sanctity of treaties' – is now facing. The order of Versailles has been replaced, not (as the majority of French opinion had hoped) by the Order of the League, but by Disorder. Is Europe heading for war, the logical outcome of this disorder; or is there still hope that the Order of the League may be built up? or that war may yet be averted – *faute de mieux* – by a return to the pre-War system of alliances?

The disintegration of the League Order – powerfully attacked by the Fascist countries, and poorly defended by France and Britain – and the decline of France as the leading European Power are one of the two main subjects of this book. Its other subject is the long period of commotion through which France has lived since 1934, when the crisis of parliamentary government culminated in the riots of the Sixth of February. Since then we have witnessed the rise of a peculiar kind of French Fascism; the appearance of what Jacques Bainville calls 'small empiric dictators', that is, National Government Premiers, who came into power whenever normal parliamentary government broke down; we have also seen the overthrow of these little dictators – Doumergue and Laval – as soon as the democratic parties had recovered sufficient self-confidence. We have witnessed a powerful reaction – which took the name of Front Populaire – against the Fascist Menace, and the great victory of the parties representing this movement in the General Election of May 1936. Soon afterwards France lived through the greatest social upheaval in her recent history – the Strikes of June 1936, when the workers of France devised a new revolutionary strike method – the stay-in strike; and when the Communists, who had been following, rather than leading the way, proclaimed a 'new legality', and flew the flag of Soviet France at the *Fête de la Victoire* at Montrouge on June 14.

A reaction against this was as inevitable in France as was the earlier reaction against Fascism.

We have also seen the Blum Government begin a French New Deal, which is still in progress; – is it a 'New Deal for Lilliputians', as Caillaux scathingly remarked?

These, and many other extraordinary events are described

at first hand, and, as far as possible, explained, in this book.

Internally, France has lived a brave and dangerous life during these years; internationally, she has led a cautious – and many would say, cowardly existence.

At the end of this book I have examined a certain number of possible answers to the question – what *is* France's destiny? I have not attempted a categorical answer, for much depends on how she can deal with forces which, especially in moments of fatalism, she believes to lie outside her control: the German and Italian volcanoes, which have already destroyed what order there was in post-War Europe; and the economic forces, which have often – but not always – been the supreme arbiter in the match between Democracy and Fascism. France, after three years of internal conflicts is still the stronghold of freedom on the Continent, and the defender of those human values which are precious to both the French and the British people. Freedom, of course, is relative; compared with the present-day totalitarian States, there was a great spiritual freedom even in Tsarist Russia; and in every democratic country freedom has its own peculiar limitations. But, in the main, France and England are still Free Countries.

Are these human values to be destroyed, either from within or from without?

At the recent Radical Congress at Biarritz, Herriot said: *'La France depuis des siècles comme une cariatide magnifique, soutient le temple de la civilisation contre cette poussée'* – the German 'push'. To English ears the phrase sounds pompous and a trifle ridiculous, but is this *cariatide* so absurd, after all? And is not the *cariatide* a nobler creature than the wooden war idol? Would it not be a thousand pities if France and England, and all that they stand for, were to go under *sous cette poussée*? Would it not be a thousand pities if the 'temple of civilisation' were *'vernichtet'* – annihilated, in accordance with *Mein Kampf*? Think of 250 million Germans in Europe (Hitler's estimate) and not a single Frenchman; – how disgusting!

If we stopped feeling self-conscious at the mention of the words 'freedom' and 'democracy' – and we do! – and if we stopped feeling inferior to the Fascist countries, we might yet

pull through. For the Fascist countries have physical strength, supported by the crudest kind of bluffing – but nothing else. And, much as I disapprove of Jacques Bainville on general grounds, I shall again quote him: 'What counts in international relation in the long run is not physical strength, but brains.'

How much longer will the Cyclops be allowed to play the part of Ulysses?

WHICH WAY FRANCE?

CHAPTER I

NON-STOP 1919–32

THE church bells were ringing in the old rue St. Jacques; and the Paris crowds were frantic with joy. The Armistice had been signed at Rethondes that morning. Like all other officers and soldiers who happened to be on leave in Paris that day, Lieutenant Jean Piot[1] was loudly cheered by the people in the street. *'Vous faites une drôle de tête!'* somebody in the crowd remarked. 'What are you making that face for? Aren't you pleased it's over?' *'C'est aujourd'hui que ça commence!'* said Jean Piot.

Anyway, that's what he told us very late one night at the Bar Basque at Biarritz.

Whatever Jean Piot may have thought of it at the time, most of his countrymen thought of the Armistice as an end, not as a beginning. For several months afterwards France was in a state of blissful repose. The nightmare was over. Fifteen hundred thousand young Frenchmen were dead; France was bled white by the War; but anyway, it was over – and France had won. Germany had been brought to her knees, and Mr. Lloyd George said she had been knocked out for sixty years. Clemenceau was at the height of his glory. Strasbourg gave him and Poincaré a rousing welcome; and, seeing the French troops enter Strasbourg, even Marcel Cachin, the future Communist leader, wept with joy.

There was all the fearful devastation in the North; but it would now be repaired; and in the Paris cafés they still served, instead of sugar, little sprinklers with diluted saccharine. But all that was nothing. Then there were the peace negotiations; and the spring of 1919 was marked by great labour

[1] Now Editor of the *Œuvre* and Vice-President of the Radical Party.

unrest, until Clemenceau agreed to introduce the eight-hour working day – which made him unpopular with the Conservatives. His popularity declined still further when it was found that the peace treaty, by leaving the Left Bank of the Rhine to Germany, was not giving France the one thing she really needed – a safe Eastern frontier.

On June 28, the day the Treaty of Versailles was signed, there were large crowds in the streets of Paris, and the town was illuminated at night; but the people were not nearly as joyful as they had been on the 11th of November. Many besides Lieutenant Jean Piot must have said to themselves: *'C'est aujourd'hui que ça commence.'*

The first five years after the War[1] were years of reconstruction, with Millerand and Poincaré as the two outstanding statesmen. In 1920 Clemenceau retired from public life, a bitter man. After the services he had rendered France during the War, he thought that the least France could do was to elect him President of the Republic. The Senate and Chamber, afraid of his dictatorial manner, thought differently, and preferred to elect to the Presidency a colourless person, M. Paul Deschanel. Deschanel did not stay long at the Élysée – for

[1] The political history of France since the War may be divided into a number of periods – each with a distinctive character of its own.

1919-24 The years of the Bloc National, post-War reconstruction, and a foreign policy culminating in the Ruhr occupation.

1924-26 The great financial crisis – the result of the five previous years. Reversal of the foreign policy of Poincaré, with Locarno as a result.

1926-29 Years of economic boom and financial stability under Poincaré. Briand's peace policy at its height.

1929-32 The Tardieu–Laval period, marked by financial extravagance and artificial prosperity in the midst of a growing world crisis. Breakdown of reparations; rise of German militarism; France's 'hegemony in Europe' beginning to decline, despite an outward appearance of everlasting wealth and invincibility.

1932-34 Crisis of the Parliamentary régime which until then had been unquestioned, culminating in the great Paris riots of February 6, 1934, and the appearance of what is loosely called 'Fascism' in France. Further rise of Germany, now under Hitler.

1934-36 France divided into two camps – struggle between Parliament and the 'Street', between 'Fascism' and the newly-formed Front Populaire, embodying the reaction against the 'Fascist menace'. Increasingly menacing attitude of Germany, culminating in the denunciation of Locarno, a denunciation which in one day turned France into 'a second-class Power'. France's 'League Policy' shaken by Laval, and again by the Rhineland coup. End of Versailles, end of Locarno, end of 'security'.

1936- Triumph of the Front Populaire, and the beginning of a new, dangerous life for France – both internally and internationally.

soon after getting there he proceeded to climb the trees in the garden, and to bathe in the fountain, and to show other signs of insanity. Before long he had to resign 'on grounds of ill-health'. Clemenceau gave a sarcastic chuckle: *'Ils avaient peur d'un gâteux: ils l'ont eu quand même.'*

M. Millerand, ex-Socialist and now super-Nationalist, who was Premier while Deschanel was President, now became President himself. He had bushy eyebrows and a heavy moustache, and fancied himself a strong man. He was a determined anti-Bolshevik. The Russian Revolution and the plague of Bolshevism had seriously scared the French bourgeoisie. This fear of Bolshevism – symbolised by the famous poster of 'The man with the knife between his teeth' – had already played an important part in the General Election of November 1919 which gave France an overwhelmingly nationalist Chamber. Millerand was a great anti-Bolshevik. He sent Weygand to Warsaw at the time of the Russian advance in August 1920, and also recognised the Wrangel Government as the Government of Russia at a time when England had already lost all faith in intervention. When, after the resignation of Deschanel, he became President of the Republic, he was determined to act the strong man. He had a strong party bias; – and was turned out by the 1924 Chamber for unconstitutional behaviour. That was the end of Millerand.

After a short spell of Briand as Premier – his Premiership was cut short in memorable circumstances, in January 1922, at the time of the Cannes Conference – Poincaré became Premier, and remained in office until the victory of the Left in the 1924 election, which marked the beginning of an entirely new phase in French post-War history.

French public life was dominated during those years by the slogan *l'Allemagne paiera.* This principle was first proclaimed by Klotz, Clemenceau's Minister of Finance, who later, symbolically enough, got into trouble for issuing worthless cheques. Those were years of unbalanced budgets, and of vast 'special budgets of recoverable expenditure'; – the money was, of course, to be recovered from Germany. In the process France 'advanced' about 100,000,000,000 francs 'on account of reparations' – of which only a small share,

about a quarter – was ultimately to be recovered from Germany under the Dawes Plan. The effect of all this – no doubt inevitable[1] – borrowing and inflation was to undermine the finances of the country, and to lay the foundations for the great financial crisis of 1924–6.

At the same time, the *bleu horizon* Chamber did not feel justified in increasing taxation. It felt that the French people had been exhausted by the War, and must not be asked to pay heavy taxes. The slack way in which even war profits were assessed and taxed contrasted strangely with the merciless exaction of excess profits duties in England. The tax increases in the 1920 Budget Act were totally inadequate for balancing even the 'ordinary budget', which included, among other things, the debt service of the loans contracted during the War. And so unaccustomed were the French people to paying taxes that when in March 1924, the franc suddenly fell to over 100 to the pound, and M. Poincaré felt obliged to introduce his *double décime* – an all-round twenty per cent increase in taxation – the general public took it very badly; and the *double décime* contributed as much to the defeat of the Bloc National as did the unpopularity of M. Poincaré's Ruhr policy.

France, as already shown, was less happy on the day the Peace Treaty was signed than on Armistice Day. She had, as the phrase went, won the War, but lost the peace. Foch had asked, for the sake of France's future security, the annexation of the Left Bank of the Rhine or, failing that, the creation of a buffer state under French control; Clemenceau abandoned this claim in exchange for an Anglo-American convention guaranteeing militarily France's Rhine frontier. But soon afterwards, when the Versailles Treaty was signed, America denounced the convention and England followed suit.

The United States also refused to enter the League of Nations. France felt cheated. She had been left face to face with Germany with a frontier between them which, after the end of the Rhineland occupation, would be little better than the frontier of 1914. True, there were Poland and the new

[1] Inevitable in a general way; though the bills that the *sinistrés* of the devasted regions presented to the government are estimated to have exceeded their real losses by an average of thirty per cent.

States of Eastern Europe – but they were small consolation compared with England and America. As for the League, it was still an unknown quantity, after America's departure; and Poincaré treated it as a joke. It is true that, at the time of the Cannes Conference, Mr. Lloyd George offered to make amends for the rejection of the Anglo-American convention; but the Briand Government was overthrown before the proposed British guarantee was given any careful consideration. The French had by this time (as Mr. Wickham Steed explains a little weakly) come to distrust Mr. Lloyd George too deeply. After that, relations with England went from bad to worse – which in turn encouraged Germany not to pay reparations; and, in the end, Poincaré decided to invade the Ruhr in order to obtain reparations, or better still (if only it were possible), to disrupt German unity, before she had time to regain her political and military strength. But the separatist movement in the Rhineland, though supported by France, proved a complete failure; the immediate material benefits that France derived from the Ruhr occupation were negligible (they were later estimated at one milliard francs net), and the tension between England and France almost reached breaking-point.

When this became clear, the French people, though not perhaps unfavourable to the Ruhr occupation at first, turned against Poincaré. The movement was led by Edouard Herriot, who believed in the possibility of a reconciliation with Germany, who considered a reconciliation with England essential, and believed in giving the League a fresh start.

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The Cartel des Gauches who won the election of 1924 were to suffer severely for the extravagance of their predecessors. The short-term loans issued during the previous years, now had to be repaid and, having lost confidence in the franc, the bondholders wished to be repaid in cash. The banks, moreover, were hostile to the Cartel – the Radical Government supported by Socialists. Financial difficulties caused the downfall of the first Herriot Government which had lasted from June 1924 to April 1925, and of the six Radical or semi-Radical Governments which fell in increasingly rapid succession between April 1925 and July 1926.

In 1925 alone three successive laws increased the advances

of the Bank of France to the State from 22 to 39½ milliard francs.[1] This was pure inflation, which sent down the franc at a spectacular rate. Caillaux – 'le traître Caillaux' – was brought back from exile by M. Painlevé in May 1925; the 'financial wizard' made a spectacular *rentrée* but could do nothing – though he had some sound ideas on financial restoration. The *mur d'argent* – or, to use a more modern phrase the Two Hundred Families – was sabotaging the Left-Wing Governments; though it is only fair to say that the Chamber itself could not make up its mind on any coherent programme of financial salvation. The Socialists demanded a capital levy, and the Radicals would not hear of it. Things went from bad to worse. In May 1926, with the pound at nearly 200, M. Raoul Péret, one of the numerous Ministers of Finance who succeeded each other during that year, threw up his arms in despair and said he couldn't understand why the franc was falling; 'strange things are happening in Europe,' he said. 'There is the *coup d'état* in Poland and all sorts of other things.' Somebody said that the Turkish ladies had become emancipated – and asked M. Péret if that was not another reason for the fall of the franc?

In the end, it was decided that M. Caillaux should be tried out again. In June 1926 he set up a Committee of Experts, which worked out a programme of financial restoration closely resembling that which M. Poincaré was going to propose to Parliament a month later. If Caillaux had been left in office he might have 'saved the franc' – though the Banks admittedly liked him less than Poincaré. But he had the misfortune of asking the Chamber for plenary financial powers, and the republican conscience of M. Herriot – who was then speaker of the Chamber – rebelled. He got out of the speaker's chair and said he would vote against Caillaux. The Briand-Caillaux Government was thereupon overthrown.

M. Herriot then formed a Cabinet which lasted only one day. The franc had dropped to its record figure of 240 to the pound, and an angry crowd assembled outside the Chamber threatening to drop M. Herriot into the Seine.

The next day M. Poincaré came back. His financial pro-

[1] At the outbreak of the War these advances amounted to 6,800 million francs.

gramme – except that he cut out the proposed foreign loan – did not differ greatly from what Caillaux had prepared; but this time the deputies had become thoroughly scared; and, more important still, Poincaré enjoyed the goodwill of the banks, which offered him immediate financial assistance until the new legislation had taken effect. This legislation, with its nine milliards of new taxation, was voted by Parliament without a murmur in less than a fortnight.

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If this second post-War phase was full of internal difficulties, it opened up hopeful prospects in the international field. Luck had it, in 1924, that France and England both had Left-Wing Governments. The Ruhr was evacuated, and the Dawes plan was agreed upon – the only satisfactory reparations settlement (as M. Herriot afterwards claimed) that France had ever obtained; a settlement which was to bring France twenty-five milliard francs. During that same year the Herriot Government hoped to place the League on a solid basis by giving its full support to the Geneva Protocol (mainly the work of Dr. Beneš) designed to render the League Covenant – and particularly Article Sixteen – an instrument of practical politics. It was, as Mr. Wickham Steed says, 'the farthest point ever reached in the fight for collective security against war'. The Protocol was adopted by the League Assembly on October 1, 1924. Unfortunately a storm was set loose against the Protocol by the British Conservative Press, which declared it monstrous that the British navy should be used as 'the world's policeman'. A few weeks later the Labour Government was defeated, and the new Tory Government under Mr. Baldwin, with Austen Chamberlain as Foreign Secretary, rejected the Protocol *en bloc*.

Together with Stresemann and Lord d'Abernon, the British Ambassador in Berlin, Mr. Chamberlain devised a new plan for 'keeping the French quiet'. Herriot frankly disliked the scheme – which, in its final form, became the Treaty of Locarno – and considered it a miserably poor substitute for his beloved Protocol; but Briand, who, in the middle of 1925, took possession of the Quai d'Orsay – a position he was going to retain for the next six years – thought better of it. Briand, though not lacking in shrewdness, was a man of hopes; and

he hoped that Locarno, with all its faults, might prove a good beginning for a better, and happier, and more confident Europe.

In subsequent years, without ever abandoning security as his first principle, Briand made numerous concessions to Germany, and British opinion encouraged and flattered him by proclaiming him the Apostle of Peace. So strong was the 'Briand myth' in Europe that Poincaré, though disliking Briand at heart, and all that he stood for, did not attempt to replace him at the Quai d'Orsay and return to the 'strong' policy of the Ruhr Occupation.

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The third post-War period, 1926–9, may aptly be called the Poincaré-Briand period. In home politics everything went very smoothly. Poincaré formed a National Government, and being a man of great tact, he managed to reduce to a minimum the friction between its component parts. Briand and Herriot, though men of the Left, both members of his Cabinet, got on well with the Premier for, unlike the Premiers of certain other 'National' Governments (such as Doumergue and Laval) Poincaré was always loyal to his colleagues, and was in every sense a true Republican. Since 1922 France had been in a state of economic prosperity, in spite of, and partly because of, the falling currency. Her trouble had been monetary, not economic. Poincaré, aided by an obedient Chamber, put the Budget right in a few days, by getting Parliament to vote nine milliards of new taxation. Yet this new taxation was not severely felt; for the economic boom (partly stimulated by German reparations payments) continued. Poincaré was, indeed, wise, in spite of the protests from the bondholders, not to over-value the franc; for after it had risen in a few weeks from 240 (the panic record) to 124 to the pound, he checked any further rise, and by November 1926 the currency was stabilised *de facto*. The stabilisation law was passed eighteen months later, in April 1928.

1926–9 were the happiest and most prosperous years of post-War France. The one unhealthy element – the falling currency – had been eliminated; and the hectic years of the currency crisis were succeeded by four years of economic and financial stability. Trade was brisk; French exports reached

record figures in 1928–9, and tourism during those years represented an annual item of invisible exports of over ten milliard francs. Hundreds of thousands of British and American tourists swarmed to France; the Norman and the Breton Coast became almost English-speaking during the summer months; there was a boom in the Paris de-luxe trades, and the years were marked by an unprecedented development in the new French industries such as motor-cars. Between 1919 and 1929 the number of cars in France had increased tenfold. The bourgeois youth of Paris became motor-mad; the Salon d'Automobile, every October, attracting innumerable provincials to Paris, was an orgy of buying; motoring, jazz, cinema and cocktail bars became the chief interest of a large part of their lives, and older Parisians shook their heads at this Americanisation of Paris. The Champs-Élysées became a centre of shopping and night life, vast new cafés with nickel-tubed furniture sprang up all over the West End; hundreds of luxurious office buildings and blocks of expensive flats were built in the Centre and West End, and thousands of *confort moderne* houses with running h. and c. water, and lifts, and thin walls, with the neighbours' inevitable wireless behind them, and high rents, sprang up in the less select quarters. The Loucheur Building Act started an unprecedented building boom all over France, and transformed much of the country round Paris into a mass – an incoherent mass – of ugly red-roofed suburban houses and villas. Transport facilities were improved and on the suburban lines smart electric trains replaced the ancient, sooty two-storey carriages, which had not changed since Monet painted his Gare St. Lazare in the 'seventies. The old ring of fortifications built in 1840 was razed to the ground, and blocks of flats were built in their place, and the old boundary between Paris and its surroundings became largely a fiction. Paris, the town of three million people, now surrounded by a ring of industrial suburbs full of active new industries, became a vast conglomeration of nearly six million people. A large number of the new inhabitants of this greater Paris were foreigners, whom the trade boom and shortage of labour had attracted to France.

The finances of the State had never been more prosperous than during 1926–9. The enormously fat 'Papa' Cheron was

M. Poincaré's Minister of Finance; and the thrifty old Norman managed to pile up in three years a surplus of something like nineteen milliard francs. About one-third of this money was spent on the so-called 'Maginot Line', which France began to build in 1928 – the year in which the military service in the French army was reduced from eighteen months to one year. Its purpose was to make up for the eventual shortage of recruits – for 1935–40, the lean recruiting years, resulting from the low birth-rate during the War were not far ahead; and, anyway, it was better to take precautions for the future, Stresemann or no Stresemann.

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The election of April 1928, held at the height of the economic boom, was little more than a plebiscite for Poincaré. The Right and Centre Parties got a small majority. In November the Radicals, at their Congress at Angers, decided to leave the Poincaré Government, with whose clerical policy they disagreed; for in those happy-go-lucky days *laïcité* was still a serious political issue in the eyes of Radical politicians. Since then, the Radicals have had to turn their minds to more serious matters. Poincaré carried on for eight months longer with a reconstructed Cabinet and with a reduced majority. The effort of getting Parliament in July 1929 to ratify the Mellon-Béranger and Churchill-Caillaux debt agreements, put a heavy strain on his constitution, and early in August he resigned his Premiership, and was taken straight to a nursing-home. He underwent two serious operations, and was never to return to public life again. He retired to his country house at Sampigny in Lorraine, and, opening the window with trembling hands, he would look anxiously at the Eastern horizon. He felt that 'they would come again'.

M. Briand became Premier, but only to be overthrown at the reassembly of Parliament in October.

But although he lost the Premiership, he remained at the Quai d'Orsay. It was, indeed, inconceivable that anyone else should take his place there.

Briand had been the master of France's foreign policy since 1925. Together with Britain, he brought Germany back to the League, and sincerely believed that a peace system could gradually be built up on League principles. The *rapproche-*

ment with Germany was essential. Briand had no illusions about France's lasting hegemony. He knew only too well that France had neither Germany's population, nor her industrial resources. If peace was to be preserved, it could only be by coming to terms with Germany. He sincerely believed in peace. *'Tant que je serai là il n'y aura pas de guerre.' 'Arrière les canons! arrière les mitrailleuses!'* His rhetoric was magnificent and had a profound effect on French public opinion. On another occasion, alluding to the Press subsidised by the armaments firms, he said that there were 'pens made of the same steel as cannons'. He was hated by the Press of the Right. The *Action Française*, raking up some more or less apocryphal stories of his young days, called him *le maquereau*; he was severely and consistently attacked by Pertinax in the *Echo de Paris*, and Sennep drew day after day the most damaging cartoons, the main purpose of which was to suggest that Briand was going gaga.

Briand's programme of Franco-German reconciliation would have made greater headway had he not been constantly restrained by his critics at home – by the Press of the Right, and, in Parliament, by men like Franklin-Bouillon and Marin, who said that he was allowing himself to be duped by Germany, which was fundamentally wicked. That was why the famous Thoiry programme, agreed upon between Stresemann and Briand, came to nothing. That is also why all French concessions to Germany were made with hesitation and bad grace. The Germans thanked England for her pressure, and France got no thanks. As for Stresemann, he was attacked by his own Nationalists for being too slow in obtaining the required concessions. Especially since the publication of the Stresemann Papers, it has been assumed in France that Stresemann was insincere and that Briand allowed himself to be duped. But that is to assume that it was still possible to 'keep Germany down'. Did not Briand, after all, simply attempt to surround Germany's restoration with a sufficiently favourable atmosphere in which a war would have been psychologically impossible? Perhaps his attempt would have failed – perhaps Germany, as she grew in strength, would have abandoned the League of Nations and repudiated Locarno in any case, Hitler or no Hitler. But, even so, was not Briand right in having at

least *attempted* this policy of Franco-German *rapprochement*, and of bringing Germany into the 'peace system'?

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1930 to 1932 – years in which Tardieu and Laval played the dominant part in French affairs – were marked by a reaction against Briand's policy. Briand still remained at the Quai d'Orsay until January 1932; but his influence declined.

Tardieu was really inconsistent. He was one of the authors of the Treaty of Versailles, he had been a staunch supporter of Clemenceau, and did not become reconciled to Poincaré until the Ruhr occupation. It was Poincaré who, in his National Government of 1926, gave Tardieu his first Cabinet post. In that Cabinet Tardieu was the man who made every effort to restrain Briand's 'generosity' to Germany.

When he became Premier at the end of 1929 he wished it to be clearly understood that he was a strong man, and that he did not believe in being sentimental about Germany. Unlike Briand, he always began by saying no; but, under British pressure, he nearly always finished by saying yes. It was he who negotiated the lamentable Young Plan, and agreed to evacuate the Rhineland – an evacuation which he surrounded with stern but purely theoretical safeguards. In 1930 he was offensive to Germany; this gave him a certain personal satisfaction, and it embarrassed Briand; but, in practice this changed manner amounted to little – except that it made England rabidly anti-French. His government, having done a great deal of harm, and no good, remained in office until December 1930, when it was overthrown by the Senate in connection with the Oustric scandal.

It was succeeded by a short-lived Steeg Cabinet, and, a month later, by a Laval Cabinet. While Tardieu was blunt, rude and seemingly uncompromising, Laval was courteous and full of mental reservations. Tardieu was openly hostile to Germany; Laval, on the contrary, claimed to desire Germany's friendship; though, in reality he did little to foster it.

It was under the first Laval Cabinet of 1931 that Briand declined completely. The Austro-German customs union which was revealed in March of that year was a terrible blow to Briand. The nationalist Press, fulminating against the duplicity of Germany, declared the Customs Union to be the

final proof of Briand's folly. In the end the Customs Union was condemned by the Hague Court by a majority of one; but the damage was done. Confidence was shaken; and the collapse of the Kreditanstalt marked the beginning of the tremendous financial crisis in Central Europe, which culminated in the Hoover Moratorium.

Briand, whose position was badly shaken by the Austro-German *coup*, tried to restore his authority by standing for the Presidency of the Republic. He was badly beaten by M. Doumer, the candidate supported by the Right of the Chamber and by the greater part of the Senate, of which he was president. It was another shattering blow to Briand. When he heard the result, he had a weeping fit, and fainted. He was becoming old and disheartened. He went to Geneva a few days later, and said he would become the 'pilgrim of peace'. The Press of the Right ridiculed the phrase, while the Left hoped that he would drop Laval, and become the leader of all the Left-Wing forces of the country. Feeling perhaps that death was near, he preferred to stay on at his beloved Quai d'Orsay. But he no longer mattered, except as a symbol, and as a sop to foreign opinion. Laval was the real Foreign Minister.

When during the great financial crisis that summer Brüning came to Paris, Laval refused him all help; though he promised to return the visit. He went to Berlin in August, trailing a doddering old Briand behind him. As they stood on the balcony of the Hotel Adlon the German crowd below cried: *'Retten Sie uns!'* The Right Press reported the words with much glee. But Laval did nothing to 'save' Germany. A Franco-German Economic Committee was set up; but it did nothing. During the Berlin visit, Laval and Briand also visited Hindenburg; Laval, rather obtusely, thought that by paying a visit to war criminal No. 2 he was making a great gesture of goodwill. The story goes that, on seeing Briand, the eighty-three-year-old Marshal asked with a touch of filial concern if *der alte Herr* would not take a seat.

It also fell to Laval's lot to deal with the Hoover Moratorium. The Hoover Moratorium which, as the French said, 'was calculated to save American investments at the expense of reparations' was badly received in France; and it took a

fortnight before the Chamber could be prevailed upon to agree to it. Having failed to obtain the assurance that the United States recognised the legal interdependence of reparations and War debts – an interdependence that Poincaré had assumed in asking Parliament to ratify the Franco-British and Franco-American debt agreements, but which had never been formally recognised by the United States – the Radicals voted against the acceptance of the Hoover Moratorium. But Laval and the majority of the Chamber had to yield almost completely to the Anglo-American clamour that France was sabotaging world recovery by not accepting President Hoover's generous offer.

After the Hoover Moratorium Laval had few illusions left that reparations would again be paid, and he tried to make the best of a bad job. Leaving Briand behind, he travelled to Washington in the company of his daughter, José, and talked to President Hoover. But Hoover committed himself to nothing, and only said that the creditor powers must take the *initiative* in arriving at a settlement. The phrase was interpreted by many as meaning that if Germany's creditors abandoned reparations, the United States would cancel the War debts. That Mr. Hoover's phrase committed the United States to nothing became only too apparent after the Lausanne Conference in June 1932.

At the end of 1931 the Laval Government was blessed with a new problem: the Manchurian conflict. The League Council met in Paris on that occasion, for Briand, who was its president, was too ill to go to Geneva. I saw Briand for the last time on that occasion. Presiding over the League in the Clock Room at the Quai d'Orsay he cut a pathetic figure. He could hardly speak. He was overcome by a continuous fit of coughing and could continue his speech only by sipping Evian after every few words, and gasping for air. I still remember that bottle with the pink label standing in front of him, which he poured out with a trembling hand. He was like the dying symbol of forlorn hopes. The 'cello was broken; Briand was a sad, pitiful old man, with the shadow of death on his flabby, weary features.

Shortly after the memorable Council Meeting at the Quai d'Orsay (the only international conversation from which Laval

– how typical already of his attitude to the League! – had carefully kept aloof) Laval dismissed Briand, and took his place as Foreign Minister. Two months later – on March 7, 1932 – Briand died and at his funeral on that cold and grey March afternoon, Tardieu delivered a funeral oration, which was described at the time as caddish. His main argument was that Briand, in spite of his 'idealism', had never lost sight of 'security', and that his policy was more akin to that of the Right than of the Left. The conclusion was obviously untrue; for even if Briand, unlike M. Léon Blum, the Socialist leader, placed security before disarmament, his policy of European conciliation had no connection with the Germanophobia of MM. Tardieu, Franklin-Bouillon, and Marin.

Looking back on that period, one may easily say that Briand's policy of conciliation 'did not pay'; and that he allowed himself to be cheated by an insincere Germany; but Briand felt that if another war was to be avoided the policy of reconciliation must at least be given a chance.

One of the riddles of post-War history is whether, or not, Germany would still have gone Hitlerite *had the policy of Briand been allowed to continue beyond 1930*, and had France, for instance, scrapped reparations while Brüning was still in power, instead of waiting until the Nationalist Government of Von Papen – the forerunner of Hitler – could claim the credit for the great diplomatic victory of Lausanne. The great question is whether, or not, Germany had Hitler 'in her blood' all along, and whether, whatever the conciliatory gestures made to her while she was still a democratic republic, she would not, in the end, still have thrown herself into the arms of Hitler. One can argue indefinitely on the subject. The view held for a long time in England was that conciliation would have been achieved if only Briand had had his way, and if the concessions – such as the evacuation of the Rhineland and the abolition of reparations – had been granted with less delay, and less hesitation, and with better grace. The opposite view widely held in France and also by some Englishmen, is that the more Germany got, the more menacing and the more militarist she became; for was it not significant, they say, that the evacuation of the Rhineland should immediately have been followed in July 1930, by the first

great election victory of the Nazis, and that the end of reparations should have been followed within scarcely a month – on July 20, 1932 – by the 'eviction' of the Socialist Government of Prussia by Von Papen's 'Government of Barons'? Again, on December 11, 1932, the 'principle' of German equality was recognised at Geneva. Six weeks later, Hitler came into power.

Be that as it may, the three last years of the Weimar Republic were marked in France by a reaction against the policy of Briand.[1]

Shortly before Briand's death, Tardieu had again become Prime Minister. British opinion disliked him even more than Laval. During those years – 1930–2 – 'French hegemony' had again become a current phrase in the British Press, and the Anglo-French conflict over disarmament had reached an acute stage. Already at the London Naval Conference of 1930 Tardieu had made himself extremely unpopular with the British, who, at that time, were only too readily impressed by Italy's passionate desire to disarm to any level, provided Franco-Italian parity was recognised – a bluff put up by Grandi at France's expense. For at that time England had developed a disarmament *mystique* – a feeling not unlike the peace ballot *mystique* of 1935; and the French view that security – that is, mutual assistance – must be organised first, and that only then could disarmament follow, was treated by most of the British Press as rank heresy, and by the British Government as a French attempt to drag Britain into Continental commitments – in other words (though these 'other words' were carefully avoided) to get Great Britain to recognise her obligations under Article Sixteen – the sanctions article – of the Covenant.

With the exception of the extreme Left – and M. Léon Blum was at that time the most prominent exponent of 'disarmament first' – French opinion found it difficult to be fired by this British disarmament *mystique*, and M. Tardieu was the last man in the world to give the British case even some verbal satisfaction. When the Disarmament Conference met in

[1] There is another theory – not without foundation – that what contributed more than anything to the economic crisis in Germany – and so encouraged the rise of Hitlerism – was the super-protectionism of the Hoover Administration and the Ottawa agreements.

February 1932 Tardieu bluntly produced a plan for an international army.

The plan was, naturally, badly received in England where it was said that under Tardieu France was carrying her clamour for security to altogether unheard-of lengths. Tardieu was annoyed, and when, in March, he was asked to come to Geneva to attend a Four-Power meeting comprising Brüning and the British and American representatives, he gave full vent to his bad humour and developed an attack of laryngitis. It was Brüning's last chance of saving his government and the Weimar Republic in the face of a fiercely growing opposition. If only Tardieu had not developed laryngitis on that occasion, and Brüning had obtained something to satisfy German public opinion – be it an increase of the Reichswehr to 200,000 men, or the recognition of even the principle of equality, or substantial financial aid, or the French recognition that reparations were virtually at an end – German democracy might conceivably have been saved – at least there was a chance, however slight. But Tardieu's laryngitis prevented Brüning from having anything to show for his labours; and, as soon as the French General Election was over (for it was no good frightening the French before the election) Brüning, the last democratic Chancellor of Germany, was summarily dismissed, and replaced by Von Papen, Hitler's forerunner. It was he who, at Lausanne, obtained from Herriot what Brüning had failed to obtain from Tardieu or Laval.

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When Laval and Briand were in Berlin the Germans could well cry *'Retten Sie uns!'* For at that time France was still, financially (as well as militarily), the strongest power in Europe. In 1930, when the economic crisis was already in full progress in the United States, Britain and Germany, France was not yet affected by it. And at that time Tardieu, grinning widely with his big long teeth, preached 'good humour' to France, and even had the bad taste to proclaim that, whatever happened elsewhere, France would remain an island of prosperity in an ocean of depression. The gold in the Bank of France rose between January 1930 and January 1932 from forty-two milliards to seventy-one milliards, and in August 1931, when Britain was obliged to borrow £50,000,000 from

the Bank of France in a last effort to save the pound, the French Press wrote of Britain's financial difficulties with undisguised *schadenfreude*.

Yet, before the French public knew it, the rot had set in, and after the election of 1932, the new Herriot Government was again faced – as in 1924 – with an alarming financial situation. For the prosperity under Tardieu and Laval was in reality – and as distinct from the Poincaré period – an artificial one. It was largely kept up by the governments' squandermania. The Budget under Tardieu had reached the unprecedented proportions of over fifty milliards; and money, including the nineteen milliard surplus piled up by the economical Henri Chéron between 1926 and 1929, was spent with spectacular facility. It was a period of financial scandals – the most important was the Oustric case, which contributed to the overthrow by the Senate of the first Tardieu Cabinet in December 1930 – and sensational bank failures, and the Tardieu Government in particular, spent money without counting. Bankrupt shipping and air companies were refloated with public money, and the refloating of the Banque Nationale de Crédit alone cost the State two milliards. When the Herriot Government came into office after the 1932 election, the cupboard was bare. It was as if MM. Tardieu and Laval had deliberately agreed to make things as difficult as possible for their Left successors. It was in some ways like a repetition of 1924 – and with a formidable economic crisis thrown into the bargain. For in 1932 France also was beginning to feel the pinch.

Among other things the fall of sterling in September 1931 had naturally tended to intensify the economic depression in France.

CHAPTER II

THE ABORTIVE FRONT POPULAIRE OF 1932

FRANCE was tired of Tardieu and Laval – especially of Tardieu with his boundless egotism, artificial *bonne humeur*, anti-democratic instincts, and fruitless foreign policy; and the General Election of May 1932 resulted in a victory for the Left, with the Radicals as the main winners and the Centre parties as the main losers. The distribution of seats was as follows:

	1928 Chamber (Before new election)	1932 Chamber (After election)	
Right[1]	124	109	−15
Centre[2]	120	88	−32
Left Centre (or 'Independent Radicals')	90	62	−28
Republican Socialists (Briand-Painlevé Group)	32	37	+ 5
Radicals	109	157	+48
Socialists	112	129	+17
Dissident Communists ('Pupistes')	5	11	+ 6
Communists	10	12	+ 2
	602	605	

The Left had gone to the polls in an optimistic mood.

The Radicals and Socialists, though not agreed on any common programme, formed an election alliance, and agreed (as they also did in 1936 under the Front Populaire) to withdraw their candidates in the second ballot for the benefit of the most favoured Left Candidate, 'in order,' as the phrase went, 'to keep out the reactionary.' The other Left-Wing groups also adhered to this arrangement, with the exception of the Communists (an important difference from 1936),

[1] Composed of Conservatives, U.R.D. (the 'Marin Group'–the largest of the Right groups) and Independent Republicans.

[2] Composed of Popular Democrats (sometimes counted among the Right) and *Republicains de Gauche* (its leaders Tardieu and Flandin, later split the party in two).

who, at that time, still treated the Radicals as imperialists, M. Herriot as 'Le Discrédit Lyonnais', and the Socialists as flunkeys of the bourgeoisie. The Socialist-Radical alliance worked, in the main, very satisfactorily, though (and this again was different from 1936) more in favour of the Radicals than of the Socialists. The second ballot on May 8, was held in a peculiar atmosphere. Two days before, a Russian maniac, who had written many prophetic insanities about a 'Peasant Russia' under the suitable name of Pavel Bred (Bred being the Russian for delirium), had assassinated President Doumer at an ex-servicemen's book sale in the Faubourg St. Honoré; and M. Tardieu, supported by M. Millerand, had tried to turn the affair into a Zinoviev Letter by maintaining (against all evidence) that Gorguloff, the assassin, was a Communist. The French electorate remained completely unaffected by this Red Scare, and voted just as they would have voted in any case.

The Socialists had expected a greater victory than their gain of seventeen seats; and at the Socialist Congress at the Salle Huyghens on May 28, M. Léon Blum declared himself to be greatly disappointed. Perhaps the chief reason of the Socialists' relative failure was their campaign in favour of a heavy reduction in French armaments – a policy that many voters must have considered 'unrealistic'.

But if the Socialist-Radical alliance worked well in the election itself, great difficulties started as soon as the question arose of forming a Left Coalition Government. Herriot, the premier-elect, was conservative in many ways, and he also greatly disliked the Socialists' insistence on disarming unilaterally to the 1928 level. He had the secret dossier about Germany's secret armaments on the brain. At their Congress on May 28, the Socialists drew up a minimum Government programme – which, called after the Salle Huyghens where the Congress met, goes by the name of *Cahiers Huyghens*. The principal Socialist demands were: the reduction of French military expenditure to the 1928 level; the immediate control and nationalisation of the manufacture of armaments; the forty-hour week without reduction in wages; unemployment insurance; nationalisation of the railways and insurance companies; control of the banks. It is interesting to look back on this programme; for, with its forty-hour working week,

nationalisation of the manufacture of armaments, etc., it resembles – while going beyond it in certain respects – the Front Populaire programme of 1936.

But although all the items of the *Cahiers Huyghens* had figured in resolutions voted a few months earlier by the Radical Congress, M. Herriot refused to accept the *Cahiers Huyghens* as a basis for Government co-operation with the Socialists. He was a strong believer in 'Security First', and was only strengthened in this belief by the developments that took place in Germany on the very day the Socialist Congress met – the fall of Brüning and the formation of the Von Papen Cabinet. As for the economic and labour reforms proposed by the Socialists, he considered that, with an unbalanced budget, France could not afford them 'in the present circumstances'. For Herriot, after his unfortunate experiences of 1926, had become a great believer in sound finance.

'The trouble with the Radicals,' M. Paul Faure, the Secretary-General of the Socialist Party, wrote rather unkindly in a pamphlet on the *Cahiers Huyghens* some time later, 'is that although they are only too ready to utter bold slogans at their Congresses and at their election meetings, they treat these slogans as so many scraps of paper once they are seated on the Government bench.' In 1932 M. Herriot certainly lacked the financial boldness that MM. Blum and Vincent Auriol were to display four years later; though, heaven knows, the conditions for a 'generous credit policy' were even less favourable in 1936 than in 1932, when the gold reserve of the Bank of France was not far off the high-water mark.

In short, owing to M. Herriot's conservatism, though also to some extent, to the uncompromising attitude of the Socialists, who wished Herriot to agree to 'everything or nothing', France had to wait for four years before any of the items of the *Cahiers Huyghens* became a reality. But at that time 'security' – security in all matters – was still the national slogan of France, and Herriot was not prepared to start any 'dangerous' experiments. The divergence revealed on that occasion between Radical theory and Radical practice caused great discontent among the Left Wing of the Radical Party, and for a long time relations remained very strained between Herriot and young and bold Left-Wingers, like Cot and

Bergery. *The discord between the two great Left parties – the victors of 1932 – was the dominant note in French parliamentary life during the next two years, and was largely responsible for the great crisis of French democracy, which culminated in the riots of February 6, 1934.*

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The three principal events under the Herriot Government of June–December 1932 were the Lausanne Conference, where Reparations were finally buried; the presentation to the Disarmament Conference in November 1932, of the Herriot–Paul-Boncour Peace Plan providing for mutual assistance by means of national contingents earmarked for League Service, for the abolition of air bombing and the international control of civil aviation. Britain's 'sanctions' commitments under this plan were made fairly elastic. But Great Britain was still suffering from her disarmament *mystique*, and the Herriot–Paul-Boncour plan was little better received in England than the Tardieu plan earlier in the year. The third event was the War debts controversy, which ended in the overthrow of the Herriot Government on December 15. French public opinion was convinced that it would be iniquitous for France to pay another penny in War debts to the United States, now that reparations were dead – killed, in fact, by the Hoover Moratorium. Nevertheless M. Herriot felt that it would be 'worth while' to pay the War debt instalment of 19½ million dollars that fell due on December 15, for the sake of future Franco-American relations (for Herriot believed that America might still play a part in the organisation of collective security) and also in order to keep in step with Great Britain who, on that first pay-day since the end of reparations, was still prepared to pay the United States the full instalment – and not merely a symbolic ten per cent, as she did later. The Herriot Government was overthrown on December 15, 1932, and after a brief spell of a Paul-Boncour Cabinet, which on January 28 was overthrown over a small financial question, the Daladier Government came into office. The day it was formed Hitler was appointed German Chancellor.

This Daladier Government, which lasted nearly nine months – until October 23, 1933 – was, in reality, the last normal and comparatively stable Government before the

storm broke loose in January 1934. While it lasted, the Third Republic seemed to stand as solidly on its foundations as ever. Mr. G. D. H. Cole, in his *Intelligent Man's Review of Europe To-day*, published in October 1933 wrote:

> 'France, the traditional home of revolutionary movements since 1789, now seems by contrast the most stably organised of all nations of Continental Europe.... Even to-day, while the French Socialists form a powerful party, and French Communism has a considerable following, the bourgeois Republic seems more stable in structure than any other continental state, and Socialism seems less likely in France than in Great Britain.'

Mr. Cole spoke of Socialism and Communism as the only remotely possible alternatives to the bourgeois Republic. In October 1933, the existence of a Fascist menace in France did not even occur to an intelligent observer like Mr. Cole. There was no strong reason why it should have occurred to him. Yet the fall of the Daladier Government marked the beginning of the great crisis of French democracy.

Since its formation in January the Daladier Government had been supported by a large part of the Socialist party – partly because in international affairs it was 'the least undesirable of all possible governments', and partly through lack of discipline in the Socialist ranks – for in 1933 the Right Wing of the Party (which, in December 1933, formally became the Neo-Socialist Party) was in open revolt against the internationalism of M. Blum. The *débâcle* of the German Social-Democrats, MM. Marquet, Déat and the other dissident leaders said, had shown that it was no longer any good to 'think internationally', and that it was time for French Socialism to recognise this unpleasant truth. The class war was nonsense. The slogan they put forward was 'Order, Authority, Nation'. At the Socialist Congress of July 1933, M. Blum declared himself 'horrified' by such a heresy, which, he said, was little short of being Fascist. The Neos found themselves in a small minority at the Socialist Congress, and the rest of the Socialist deputies, who, until then had not strictly observed the party discipline, decided, for fear of being expelled, to follow the injunctions of the Congress. One of these injunctions was that, whatever sympathy they might feel for the

Radical Government of M. Daladier, they must not support a policy of deflation, and especially one involving wage cuts.

The trouble started over the 1934 Budget Bill, as soon as the Chamber met in October, 1933 (a few days after Germany's departure from the League). In 1932 the Herriot Government had greatly reduced the budget deficit by cutting military and administrative expenditure, and also by floating a successful conversion loan. But the economic crisis had grown worse during 1933, and with the revenue falling, the Daladier Government reluctantly decided that the time was ripe for new economy cuts. Among the measures proposed by M. Daladier was a six per cent cut in state wages. The Socialists rebelled.

In spite of the numerous sops – such as the control of the armaments firms and the beginnings of a nationalisation of the petrol trade – offered to them in the Daladier Bill, the Socialists (with the exception of twenty-nine members, who had already virtually split away from the Party at the July Congress, and who were to form, two months later, the Neo-Socialist Party) refused, after lengthy negotiations, to support the Bill on a motion of confidence. The angry dialogue that night between M. Daladier and M. Blum, the Socialist leader, is still well remembered by those Radicals who hold Blum's inflexible and uncompromising spirit largely responsible for the disruption of the Left majority in the 1932 Chamber and for the subsequent misfortunes that befell Parliamentary Government in France. In the light of subsequent events, his criticism of Daladier was highly characteristic: 'What have you done,' he cried, addressing M. Daladier, 'except chase elusive phantoms in the hope of balancing the Budget? Have you not yet realised that you are on the wrong track?' Instead of trying to pour fresh blood into the economic life of the country, the government, he said, had been wasting its time playing with Budget deficits. Who was behind this unconstructive policy? he asked, alluding to the pressure of the banks on the Treasury. 'We were part of your majority,' Blum continued reproachfully, 'what right had you, gentlemen, to place us in this cruel dilemma? [i.e., the choice between preserving the Left majority and agreeing to the wage cuts.] How could you expect us to accept any compromise?'

M. Daladier (brutally): 'Then why did you negotiate for three days?' (Loud cheers.)

Blum's criticism of Daladier was precisely the kind of criticism that the Socialists were to address to every government between 1933 and 1936. It was consistent with their opposition to deflation – especially deflation affecting wages. Deflation was, in their view, not a remedy against the crisis, nor even a remedy against budget deficits, but, on the contrary, an aggravation of both the crisis, and, through the resulting diminution in purchasing power, of the financial difficulties of the State. Blum's allusion to the banks is another theme that runs through the whole history of the last few years. What he meant was that the Daladier Government was being forced by the Bank of France into a policy of deflation. We shall hear more, as we go along, about the 'occult power' of the Bank of France and of its privileged shareholders, the '200 families'.

But justified as Blum's argument may have been in the abstract, he showed on October 23, 1933 that he lacked a certain sense of realities. Granted that the Daladier Government was being forced by the Bank of France to ask for a reduction in government wages, was it expedient to break up the Chamber majority, and confront France with a dangerous political crisis? For immediately after the overthrow of the Daladier Government, one did not need to be a prophet to say that the formation of a National Government, following the collapse of the Left-Wing majority, was now a matter of weeks. Everybody in the Chamber lobbies said so.

The Sarraut Government, slightly more to the Right than the Daladier Government, had an inglorious existence of three weeks, and was overthrown on November 22, with the help of the Socialists, over a financial bill whose deflationist measures were even milder than Daladier's.

Under the Chautemps Government which followed, it began to dawn on the Socialists that this constant massacre of governments was beginning to irritate public opinion, and that Parliament was in danger of becoming totally discredited. So they resorted to a subterfuge. Instead of voting either for or against Chautemps's financial bill, they feigned indignation, and, walking in a body out of the debating hall, declared

that they would have nothing to do with such disgraceful financial methods. The manœuvre was a little too transparent.

Even so, it looked as though Chautemps had turned the bad corner where Daladier and Sarraut had come to grief. It almost looked as though the Socialists had repented for their past errors and that a solid Left majority might yet be reconstructed. But it was too late.

CHAPTER III

THE SIXTH OF FEBRUARY AND AFTER

THE subsequent events of January and February 1934, with the Stavisky Scandal, the financier's mysterious death, the outcry in Paris, the nightly Royalist demonstrations outside the Chamber, the resignation of the Chautemps Cabinet, the savage anti-parliamentary campaign in the Press, the short-lived Daladier Cabinet, with its record of heavy blunders, culminating in the bloody riots of February 6, followed, in turn, by the hurried resignation of the Daladier Government and the formation, on February 9, of the National Government of M. Doumergue, were the most dramatic events Paris had seen since the Commune of 1871. In my earlier book, *France in Ferment*, I described in detail, on the strength of all the available data, as well as from personal observation, those dramatic days, in which parliamentary government in France seemed nearer a final breakdown than at any time before or since. In the present book, which is chiefly concerned with more recent events, I shall only recall briefly the main episodes of the 1934 crisis, in so far as they are indispensable to an understanding of what happened later.

Since the fall of the Daladier Government on October 23, a large section of public opinion had been in a state of growing irritation against Parliament; the economic crisis was growing worse; the international outlook was depressing, and the Press of the Right, apparently frightened by the prospect of a belated reconciliation between the Socialists and Radicals, started a vigorous campaign in favour of a National Government.

Christmas was marred by the news of the terrible railway disaster at Lagny which made people feel as though France were being pursued by an evil fate.

And then, in the last days of the year, the papers began

to speak of a great financial scandal at Bayonne engineered by a person called Stavisky. The *Action Française*, which had been conducting a savage campaign against Chautemps, '*le ténébreux*', came out on January 3 with sensational disclosures about Dalimier, a member of the government. By the 5th of January the Stavisky scandal had risen from the *fait divers* status to the monumental front-page headline. In the Press of the Right the Stavisky scandal and Republican Government became synonyms. The *Action Française* launched its anti-parliamentary cry – a cry last heard in Paris at the time of the Panama scandal – *A bas les voleurs*, and the cry was taken up by a large part of the Paris people.

Stavisky, in the meantime, had vanished, and it was not until January 8 that the police discovered him in a villa at Chamonix - with a bullet through his head. According to the police version, he had fired it just as they were breaking into his room. Without regaining consciousness, he died in hospital the next morning. Nine-tenths of Paris were convinced – and even the Socialist Press said so – that Stavisky, who 'knew too much' had been 'suicided' by the police. But who had ordered his removal? Actually, the facts clearly suggest that he committed suicide – though very probably 'by persuasion' – while the police were encircling his villa.

But on January 9 nearly everybody in Paris believed that he had committed suicide. However fantastic some of the stories published about Stavisky in the Press, they all agreed on the following points: that he was a jailbird who had been released *en liberté provisoire* in 1926; that his trial had been postponed nineteen times, and that he had been able, in the interval, to engineer one swindle after the other – the total amounting to some 200 million francs. It was also clear that he had had many influential friends in the police, in the judiciary, and in Parliament, without whom all this would not have been possible.

But the exact facts were not clearly known and even the wildest rumours received credence. The Royalists of the *Action Française* fully exploited the situation. The first meeting of the Chamber was accompanied by noisy Royalist demonstrations in the Boulevard St. Germain, with hundreds of young men shouting, '*à bas les voleurs!*' In the Chamber the *affaire*

gave rise to some violent scenes. The Right hurled accusations at the Left; the Left replied that if this was a 'Left' scandal, there were plenty of 'Right' scandals in the past – and bigger ones at that – which could be recalled. The whole atmosphere was poisonous with suspicion. In the meantime, the judicial inquiry was progressing with regrettable slowness; and with the exception of a few of Stavisky's immediate associates, the only two men to be arrested were two journalists, Dubarry of the Left *Volonté* and Aymard of the Right *Liberté*.

Chautemps's attitude struck even many people of the Left as unfortunate: he appealed to the Chamber not to overdramatise the *affaire*, and – worse still – refused to agree to the formation of a parliamentary committee of inquiry. This played into the hands of the men of the Right, who proceeded to insinuate that Chautemps himself was mixed up in the case. The *Action Française* which had published some 'revelations' about him even before the outbreak of the Stavisky case, intensified its campaign against Pressard, Chautemps's brother-in-law whom, in his capacity of *Procureur Général*, it declared to be directly responsible for the facilities Stavisky had received from the Parquet, the Public Prosecutor's office in charge of the conduct of prosecutions. Other papers took up the campaign.

After a particularly savage attack on the Chautemps Government by M. Henriot, the spokesman of the Right – an attack which led to the resignation of M. Reynaldy, M. Chautemps's Minister of Justice – the Chautemps Government itself resigned on January 25, before waiting to be overthrown by the Chamber.

The Royalist demonstrations in the streets had, in the meantime, become, not only more frequent, but more and more violent in character; they were popular with a large part of the public, and on January 25, the night of Chautemps's resignation, there was something resembling a real riot in the Grands Boulevards, with large crowds smashing café furniture and shouting *'A bas les voleurs!'* and *'Stavisky au Panthéon!'* The police, under M. Chiappe, treated the rioters with the utmost consideration.

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M. Daladier, the new Premier, had the reputation of a strong and honest man, and his appointment to the Premiership had a soothing effect on Paris. He thought that the Radicals had been discredited, and that another party government would be unpopular. He therefore began by trying to form an 'above-party government of strong men' belonging to almost every party, and including such respected members of the Right as M. Ybarnégaray – later a leading member of the Croix de Feu. In the process he treated the Radicals with some disdain, and they resented it. But the Right felt that Daladier was not the right man to form a National Government – they had their own plans, and waited until the situation had become still worse – and they let Daladier down. In short, by the time his government was formed, he had managed to make himself unpopular with everybody; and he felt that his chances were poor for surviving a motion of confidence at the Chamber.

Chiappe, the Prefect of Police, had behaved during the Royalist demonstrations in January, as no servant of the Republic should have behaved.[1] That, and the fact that he had always been hated by the Socialists and Communists, prompted Daladier to take a bold step, which would please the Left at the Chamber, and secure for him the sorely needed Government majority. Three days before the meeting of Parliament he rang up Chiappe, and declared that the government wished to offer him the post of Governor-General of Morocco. Chiappe did not take long to understand that his presence was no longer wanted at the head of the Paris police. He refused. He refused one of the highest French colonial posts. He declared that if he left Paris in the present circumstances, he would feel a dishonoured man. Daladier afterwards claimed that Chiappe was in a rage, and threatened to *descendre dans la rue* – to start a riot in the streets of Paris. Chiappe denied this and claimed that the Premier had misunderstood him; he had said: *je serai à la rue* and not *'dans la rue'* – I shall be in the street, a poor, homeless man.

Whatever may have been the exact words that Chiappe used on that occasion – and it was a moot point which afterwards

[1] That, and not his alleged negligence in the Stavisky Affair, which Daladier later tried to prove, was the real Left 'case' against Chiappe.

gave rise to endless discussions – Daladier had acted with great incoherence. Either Chiappe had played a discreditable part in the Stavisky affair – as the Left Press claimed at the time, but without solid proof[1] – or had shown by his behaviour that he was a menace to the Republic – and in either case it was absurd to appoint him Governor-General of Morocco; – or else his conduct was impeccable, and there was no reason for removing him from Paris. But Daladier wanted to have it both ways. He did not dare to sack him outright; and he did not dare to leave him in Paris either. He was undesirable; and yet he deserved to be made Governor-General of Morocco. It was a sop to the Left and a consolation prize to the Right. Chiappe was being both punished and rewarded. It was enough to discontent everybody.

No less absurd was Daladier's dismissal of M. Fabre, the director of the *Comédie Française*, presumably because his production of Shakespeare's 'anti-democratic' *Coriolanus* had given rise during the whole of January, to noisy Royalist demonstrations in and around the theatre, and his replacement by M. Thomé, the head of the Sûreté Générale. A policeman running the *House of Molière*!

The anger over Chiappe's dismissal was accompanied by loud laughter over Daladier's Sûreté Générale – *Comédie Française* 'combination'. Daladier's explanation that the head of the Sûreté Générale had a taste for literature did not improve matters. Two of his Ministers resigned; and one can imagine the capital the Press of the Right made of Daladier's inconsequent behaviour. In fact, the Press of the Left was scarcely any kinder. Never had a government appeared before the Chamber in more unfavourable conditions.

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During the three days between the dismissal of Chiappe and the meeting of the Chamber a great many things happened in Paris. The Right, naturally, decided that the scurrilous treatment that their dear Chiappe had suffered at the hands of Daladier could not be taken lying down. The Royalists, various patriotic leagues (of which one had not heard

[1] All that could definitely be proved against Chiappe in this connection is that he had a certain number of extremely fishy friends among the 'top-hat underworld', to which Stavisky also belonged.

much until then), and a number of ex-servicemen's organisations all decided to demonstrate on Tuesday, February 6, in the Place de la Concorde, against Daladier. His challenge to 'Public Opinion' could not be left unanswered. But while the Right was intensely hostile to Daladier, the Left also felt that Daladier had made rather a mess of things. The strong silent man had behaved with great incoherence. Rumours were, moreover, started on the Right that the real man behind it all was Frot, the ambitious Minister of the Interior, who, it was said, was planning a coup, and that Daladier was merely a tool in his hands. Stories were circulated about Senegalese troops having been called to Paris to shoot down anyone who opposed the government.

The 6th of February, 1934, in the course of which twenty rioters and one policeman were killed, and about a thousand rioters and over six hundred policemen and gardes mobiles injured has been described as a turning-point in French history. The Left has also called it a 'Fascist plot'; and the *Peuple*, the Trade Union paper, in its number of February 8, said that, on February 6 'Fascism had, for the first time, shown its ugly face to France'. The Right, on the other hand, claimed that the February 6 demonstrations were dictated by the spontaneous feeling of indignation among all good Frenchmen; and that the 'government of assassins' had massacred in cold blood the patriots who had simply come out into the streets to vent their disgust with Parliament and the Daladier Government – *un sursaut de la conscience française*. Other men of the Right have gone even farther, calling it the beginning of the National Revolution – a Nationalist 14th of July.

The facts have been distorted on both sides. February 6 was not, strictly speaking, a 'Fascist plot'; still less was it a 'massacre of patriots'. It is true that several ex-servicemen's organisations, the Royalists, the Jeunesses Patriotes, the Solidarité Française and other bodies hostile to the Government decided two or three days in advance to meet at various points of Paris in the afternoon and evening of the 6th of February, and to march across the Place de la Concorde towards the Chamber and to demonstrate against *les voleurs*. The Croix de Feu, who had already demonstrated in the Faubourg St. Honoré on the previous night, were to concentrate their

forces on the left bank of the Seine, behind the Chamber. There is no doubt that there was some co-ordination between these various groups; and that one of the men behind the scenes was none other than M. Chiappe, still flaming with Corsican resentment over the loss of his job. But there is little to show that there was any clear plan to seize power, or even to capture the Chamber. All the 'Fascist' forces were concentrated around the Chamber, but no attempt was made to seize the government offices, or the power stations. It is true that on February 7, while the Daladier Government was still resisting against the clamour for its immediate resignation, a plan was beginning to take shape for setting up a provisional Government at the Paris Town Hall (a witness before the Parliamentary Committee of inquiry claimed that the plan was mentioned to him on February 7 by M. de Tàstes, the Right-Wing deputy); but on February 6, this plan had not yet been worked out; nor had any preliminary agreement been reached on the subject among the 'Fascist' leaders.

One has to remember that at that time the Croix de Feu, the Royalists, the Solidarité and the Jeunesses Patriotes had no more than a few thousand active members between them, and that they would have been incapable of a real armed uprising. What they reckoned on was the support of the Paris public as a whole; and the most that they could reasonably have aimed at was the resignation of the Daladier Government. When this happened on February 7, Colonel de la Rocque announced that 'the first objective had been attained'. The 6th of February was less the work of Fascists than of an important section of public opinion, which had been worked up into a state of anger by a fierce anti-Parliamentary and particularly anti-Left campaign in the Press. The Stavisky Affair had given this Press an undreamed of opportunity for vilifying Parliament, and, especially, the Left-Wing politicians, all of whom were identified with the handful of black sheep mixed up in the *affaire*. The Press of the Right, and the people behind it, were alarmed by signs of a growing reconciliation between the Radicals and Socialists, and the possible restoration of a Left Cartel. They wanted a National Government dominated by the Right.

It is unfortunately only too true that, on February 6,

Daladier had nobody *for* him in the whole of Paris, for even the best Republicans felt that the Daladier Government was not very well qualified to represent the Republic. When it was learned that there would be an anti-government demonstration in the Place de la Concorde, thousands of Parisians – prompted by sympathy or simply by curiosity – joined in the movement. M. Bonnefoy-Sibour, the new Prefect of Police, had been overwhelmed by the extent of the coming demonstration and had found it impossible, for want of a sufficient number of police, to cordon off the Place de la Concorde. All he could do early in the afternoon was to cordon off the Concorde bridge leading from the Place de la Concorde to the Chamber. Soon after four o'clock the Place de la Concorde was already crowded with people, many of them shouting '*à bas les voleurs*'. At five o'clock the first stones were thrown at a police lorry; and by six o'clock, after the closing of the shops and offices, the Place de la Concorde became a howling mob of about a hundred thousand people. All over the square, and in other parts of Paris, battles broke out between the rioters and police; the efforts made by parties of mobile guards and by mounted guards to disperse the crowds were in vain. A few of the mounted guards were dragged down from their horses and savagely beaten, until they were rescued by their comrades. Many of the horses were badly cut by razor-blades attached to the end of walking-sticks – one of the weapons used by the 'peaceful demonstrators'. Other weapons and missiles included pieces of macadam broken up at the Tuileries end of the Concorde, and bits of iron railings and fragments of garden chairs brought down from the Tuileries gardens, which, like the Place de la Concorde, was crowded with rioters. But the main battle was in front of the bridge, where the cordon of police and mobile guards were pelted for hours with stones and pieces of iron. So many guards and policemen were injured during the evening that the cordon had to receive reinforcements every ten minutes or so. From time to time a party of guards would charge the crowd; but with no result. The rioters – mostly young men – had by this time made up their minds to break through the cordon, and to burst into the Chamber.

About seven o'clock a motor-bus was stopped by rioters (for,

strangely enough, the traffic had not been stopped in the Place de la Concorde) who, after several unsuccessful attempts, succeeded in setting fire to it. For two hours the bus burned, filling the air with the stench of burning rubber. Burning rags were also thrown through six of the windows of the Ministry of Marine, and it was only by fighting for their lives and with the greatest of difficulty – for the rioters persisted in cutting the hoses – that a fire brigade put out the flames by nine o'clock.

In the meantime the attacks upon the police cordon on the bridge had grown more and more fierce; and a few minutes before eight o'clock, when the cordon had been forced halfway across the bridge, the guards fired a first volley. Here is how I described that memorable episode in *France in Ferment*, written a few months after the riots:

> 'At 7.30 a procession of the Solidarité Française, numbering about 1,500 men, arrived in the Concorde from the Grands Boulevards. Their avowed intention was to break through the barrier on the bridge and to reach the Chamber. The fire-hoses which the police [in the Place de la Concorde] turned on them were captured by the rioters and turned against the police and guards. The mounted guards retreated almost in a state of panic, and added to the bewilderment of the *gardes mobiles* on the bridge. The rioters advanced shouting, 'Come on to the Chamber! Throw the guards into the river!' Several of them pushed their way through the barrier of police vans [on the bridge] others ran along the parapets past the barrier. There was a moment of panic among the guards. The police and the guards, feeling their lives in danger, brought out their pistols. It was then that the first shots were fired. Some were fired into the air, others at the rioters. M. Marchand and the officers tried to prevent the panic-stricken guards from firing any more, but before they could stop them there was another volley; many of the men who had been pelted with stones for hours had, by this time, lost all self-control. Six of the rioters were killed and forty injured. A stray bullet fired into the air killed a woman on the second floor of the Hotel Crillon.
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> 'During that onslaught many of the guards and police, including three of the men in command of the bridge, were injured – M. Marchand, struck on the head by stones and other missiles had to be taken to the Chamber infirmary; Inspector Rotée had his ankle fractured; Captain Fabre, gravely wounded in the stomach by a piece of metal, was rushed to hospital.

The rumour that he had been killed added to the exasperation of the guards.

'Although the southern part of the Concorde was cleared almost as far as the obelisk (which was now no longer flood-lit), the rioters on the northern side of the Square were frantic with rage. Thousands were now shouting, "Assassins! Assassins!" at the guards on the bridge. The police forces in front of the bridge increased to nearly five hundred. Discouraged by the firing, the rioters kept for a time at a respectful distance.'

Another volley was fired in similar circumstances shortly after eleven o'clock by the guards on the bridge; and this time six rioters were killed and seventeen wounded. It was the general opinion that if they had not done so, the rioters would have broken into the Chamber.

Innumerable clashes had been taking place all evening between the rioters and the police all around the Place de la Concorde. The Café Weber in the rue Royale was turned into a dressing-station. The rioters were a mixed crowd of people, many of them belonging to no particular organisation; and, oddly enough, there were even some Communists among them. For among the organisations that demonstrated in the Champs-Élysées and the Concorde that night was the A.R.A.C., the Federation of Communist ex-servicemen. The Communists were that night on the side of the anti-parliamentary rioters and when in his recent book on *France To-day and the People's Front* M. Thorez, the Communist leader, asserts that the Communists organised 'anti-Fascist' demonstrations on February 6, one cannot help wondering on what evidence the assertion is based.

The Croix de Feu, who in the months that followed, became the most powerful of the Fascist organisations, and who made the greatest capital out of the 6th of February, were in reality less active during the riots than most of the other Royalist and 'Fascist' organisations. At that time they were still composed of ex-servicemen only; and instead of going into the Place de la Concorde, they gathered in the Esplanade des Invalides and its side-streets, at the back of the Chamber. Marching backward and forward, and singing the Marseillaise, they created the impression that they *might* have broken into the Chamber (which was but poorly defended from that side) had they wished to do so, and had they been prepared to sacrifice a few

lives. The formula *montrer de la force sans en user* was one that Colonel de la Rocque had learned from Lyautey under whom he had served in Morocco.

As we shall see, this show of strength as a means of pressure against Parliament was to become the chief weapon in the hands of the Croix de Feu during the Doumergue régime – until the time when the Radicals called the Croix de Feu bluff.

The battle in and around the Place de la Concorde continued until midnight. But long after, while the bridge was still guarded by exhausted detachments of the *garde mobile* (for at no moment were regular troops called into action), crowds of young men, many of them with bloodstained bandages, could be seen all along the Grands Boulevards singing the Marseillaise and shouting 'Assassins!' at passing police lorries. There was a feeling of elation among these young men. Many of them sincerely believed that they had rendered France a great service.

With the Right, the 6th of February has become a heroic legend. I know many young Frenchmen who still point proudly to some little scar on their forehead. *'C'était le 6 Février, à la Concorde.'* If they had said: *'C'était à Verdun,'* they could scarcely have said it with greater pride.

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On the following day the Daladier Government resigned. It thought at first of proclaiming martial law, and of resisting by every means. The Socialists believed that it should resist – for the overthrow by 'the street' of a democratic government (which, on the previous night, while the firing was going on outside the Chamber, had received a large majority) was obviously going to set up a dangerous precedent. But the police could scarcely be relied upon any longer; and even the army was doubtful. And there was a loud public clamour in Paris for the immediate resignation of the government of *fusilleurs*. Even the Communists, in the *Humanité* of February 7, treated the Daladier Government as a gang of *assassins*.

The working class of Paris was taken unawares; and did not realise at once what had happened; and although the C.G.T. might have ordered a general strike to assist the Daladier Government, the latter felt that it was too late. Even the

President of the Republic, pressed hard by Marshal Lyautey, who threatened that morning to march on the Chamber at the head of the Jeunesses Patriotes, was against the government, and threatened to resign, if the Daladier Government resisted. Early in the afternoon while Parisians were gathering in the Place de la Concorde to examine the wreckage and the bullet holes in the pedestals of the statues, and possibly to start another riot, the Daladier Government hurriedly resigned. The Republic, it said, had been saved; but more bloodshed must be avoided. Immediately afterwards M. Lebrun called for M. Doumergue who, for several weeks past, had nursed his candidature for the Premiership – a candidature that was being advocated, more and more openly, by the Right Press.

February 7, with the police completely disorganised, was a day of lawlessness in Paris. It was no longer heroic. Hundreds of sinister hooligans descended from heaven knows where upon the shopping centre; and between 8 and 10 p.m. the dark deserted streets resounded with the clatter of broken glass. All along the rue de Rivoli, along the rue de la Paix, in the Boulevard des Capucines, and as far north as the Gare St. Lazare shops were being looted. When about ten o'clock police detachments began to patrol the streets most of the damage had been done. There was some firing here and there; and a few more people were killed and injured; and the wounded were again taken to the Café Weber in the rue Royale, where ambulances came to collect them.

The next morning M. Doumergue arrived at the Gare d'Orsay, and drove to the Hotel Continental right in the middle of the shopping district with its hundreds of smashed show windows. A large crowd had gathered outside the hotel to cheer him. He had dropped the smile that had made him so popular during his Presidency of 1924–31. He now looked grave and extremely self-important. He was like a grandfather who had come to restore order among a crowd of very naughty children. The following evening, February 9, his government was formed. The Radicals, who had got a serious fright on February 6, thought Doumergue the least of all possible evils, and readily authorised Herriot and four other Radicals to join the 'government of National Truce'.

On that same night the Communists had called an anti-

Fascist demonstration in the Place de la République – a demonstration in which six people were to be killed and about 200 injured.

But before dealing with this demonstration of February 9 – a date which the Left have since commemorated every year by laying red flowers and wreaths on the statue of the Republic in the Place de la République, it is well to explain what were the earlier reactions of the Left to the 'Fascist coup of February 6'.

The French working class had been taken by surprise. The Communists had actually taken part in the riots; and the *Humanité* of February 7 had treated the Daladier Cabinet as a 'government of murderers'; the Radicals were bewildered; and it was only the Socialists who saw fairly clearly the whole seriousness of February 6, and of the resignation of the Daladier Government under pressure from the 'street'. On the night of the 6th, the Socialists, as distinct from the Communists, had voted for the Daladier Government, but it was not, as M. Blum explained before the division, a 'vote of confidence' (for in reality they had no confidence in Daladier) but *un vote de combat* – that is, a challenge to those who were trying to overthrow the government by unconstitutional methods. At that time the firing was already going on outside the Chamber of Deputies.[1] As already shown, the Socialist leaders took a serious view of the government's resignation under outside pressure, and they urged Daladier to resist. Only they soon discovered (as M. Frossard was to declare at the Socialist Congress the following May), that Daladier 'found that the series of incoherent actions of which he was guilty a few days earlier, had bewildered and maddened public opinion and that he had lost all authority both with the general public and with Parliament'.

Nevertheless, the overthrow of the Daladier Government by 'the street' could not remain unchallenged as far as the Socialists were concerned. On February 7 the Socialist Trade Union Federation (the C.G.T.) called a twenty-four-hour General Strike for the following Monday, February 12. The order was accompanied by a statement that this had been

[1] That extraordinary Chamber sitting, with the firing going on outside, is described in detail in *France in Ferment*.

given in co-operation with the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, the Socialist party, the Dissident Communist (*Pupiste*) party, the Anarchist Union and others; – but there was no mention of the Communists.

The Communists were keeping aloof. When, on the same day, the Socialist party called a protest meeting in the Place de la Bastille, for the following day (February 8), the Communists refused to associate themselves with it. Instead, they decided to hold a protest meeting of their own in the Place de la République on February 9. The Socialists thereupon called off their meeting at the Bastille, and decided to concentrate their efforts on the General Strike on the following Monday. The attitude of the Communists was curiously incoherent at first sight. But there was some logic in this incoherence. True, they had demonstrated side-by-side with the 'Fascists' on February 6; they had damned the Daladier Government; they had also continued to treat the Socialists as flunkeys of the so-called assassins (Frot and Daladier); and yet, feeling that their whole attitude on February 6 and 7 had been absurd, and that the working class was beginning to react sharply against the 'Fascists' (regardless of the faults of Daladier), the Communists suddenly decided to take the 'lead' in the anti-Fascist campaign by demonstrating in the Place de la République. It was perhaps a tactical mistake on the part of the Socialists to have called off their own protest demonstration the day before; for by doing so, they gave the Communists the chance to claim afterwards that they, and not the Socialists, were the first to have fought on the barricades 'against Fascism'.

I have described in *France in Ferment* that terrible, but strangely romantic night, so curiously reminiscent in many ways of the barricade battles of 1832 and 1848. The Place de la République had been cordoned off by mounted and mobile guards, and for four hours, in a cold fog, a guerilla war went on in the narrow streets of the Faubourg St. Denis, and as far north as Belleville and the Gare du Nord, between the police and the Communists. After their ordeal of February 6 and 7 the police were in a state of 'nerves', and fired indiscriminately at the Communists – who, needless to say, were a tough lot, and did not hesitate to manhandle a *flic* whenever they got a chance. I saw many of these workmen taken on stretchers to

the Hôpital St. Louis. Four men were killed that night, and two more died of their wounds. In a way, it was an aimless 'demonstration', and yet, there was a fine spirit of idealism among these men, who risked their lives simply in order to 'protest'. They were not the scum and rabble, as they were called in the Right Press on the following day: and although most of them were miserably poor people, not a single shop was looted during that night. Nor did they burn down any churches – which was another red scare story published in the British Press the next day. The 'demonstration' of February 9 was in the best revolutionary tradition of the Paris working class; and the death of the obscure workmen who sacrificed their lives fighting on the barricades that night, stirred in a strange way the imagination of the French working class as a whole. The 'competition' between the Socialists and Communists in February 1934 is being forgotten; and the men who died on February 9 are no longer Communist martyrs (though the Communists have not forgotten it), but 'heroes of the anti-Fascist front'. On February 9, 1936, not only red, but also tricolour wreaths were laid on the statue in the Place de la République.

But in 1934 Socialists and Communists were still – on the surface – in fierce competition. The Communists had at first turned a deaf ear to the Socialist and C.G.T. decision to call a General Strike on February 12. It was not until two days before that the C.G.T.U. (the Communist trade unions) decided to join in the General Strike, but making it clear, at the same time, that they had not been guided by Socialist initiative. They actually suggested that the Socialists were 'not really meaning business', that they were likely to 'give way to various manœuvres' and that only the Communists could make the General Strike a success. Such verbiage was, of course, to be expected from the Communists; the Socialists and the C.G.T. were, nevertheless greatly satisfied with the decision the Communists and their trade unions had taken. They felt that, in spite of themselves, the Communists were coming nearer a 'united front', under the pressure of working-class opinion.

This General Strike was the first vast anti-Fascist demonstration in France. Except that the organisers of the strike

had themselves decided not to make things too unpleasant for the ordinary citizen (they did not, for instance, stop the railways, water and lighting) the twenty-four-hour strike was very nearly complete.

It was a warning, and a severe warning, to the 'Fascists'. The 100,000 Socialists and Communists who assembled in the Cours de Vincennes that afternoon, carrying anti-Fascist banners – 'Chiappe en prison', 'Le Fascisme ne passera pas', 'On ne suicidera pas la République', etc. – were only a small gathering compared with the vast Front Populaire demonstrations of more recent times; but, it was the first gathering of its kind. Though keeping formally apart, the Socialists and Communists in reality joined forces for the first time; and there were moments when the friendly Communist crowds would form a ring round the Socialist leaders, and when the Communist leaders were cheered by the Socialist rank and file, who shouted: *'La soudure!'* Marceau Pivert and Zyromsky, the Left-Wing Socialist leaders, were mad with joy.

It may reasonably be said that if in subsequent months the drift of the Communists towards the Front Commun was largely determined by Moscow's desire to build up an anti-Fascist front in France, it was determined, at least to the same extent, by the ardent desire of the rank and file – both Communist and Socialist – to join forces against the common enemy. Later the Front Commun developed into the Front Populaire, when the Radicals had become disillusioned in the virtues of National Government – that is, National Government with the Right, and without – and even against – the two great proletarian parties.

In the years that followed France was split into two parts – the Right following 'the men of the 6th February', and the Radicals following – albeit hesitatingly at times – 'the men of the 9th and 12th of February' who had come to symbolise not Communism, but the first anti-Fascist reaction. 'The French people,' as Julien Benda rightly observed in the *Dépêche de Toulouse*, after witnessing the vast Front Populaire procession of July 14, 1936, 'knew that it was all the outcome of the 6th of February – the inevitable, and invariable reaction of the French people against any open attack on their freedom:–

> 'This giant procession, the like of which had never yet been seen in Paris, was the direct outcome of the 6th of February. So also were the formation of the Front Populaire and the last General Election. The Waldeck-Rousseau Cabinet was the outcome of the Anti-Dreyfus agitation; the 1877 Election, with its Left victory, was the outcome of the MacMahon *coup*. In the last sixty years a sharp offensive from the reactionaries in France has been followed, with mathematical accuracy, by a sharp, inevitable reaction from the Left. The men who organised the 6th of February riots could have been sure of it. But their stupidity, as M. Herriot has said, is even greater than their wickedness. In the meantime, until they understand, let them contemplate their work from their balconies.'

The evolution of the two 'fronts' during the months that followed is worth examining. For if the Left developed a *mystique* on the strength of the Fascist coup of February 6, the Right also made the 6th of February the symbol of a new faith.

During the eight months of the Doumergue *régime* (for its advent was more than a mere change of government) the men of the 6th of February had the upper hand. During these eight months the 'Fascist' offensive was at its height. It was ultimately broken, not by the Socialists and Communists, but – by the Radicals, in connection with Doumergue's programme of 'Constitutional Reform'.

CHAPTER IV

PARLIAMENT BULLIED BY THE STREET – THE CROIX DE FEU

THERE was no normal parliamentary government in France between February and November 1934. The 'blackmail of the Street' – *le chantage de la rue* – which had succeeded so well on February 6, continued, and kept M. Doumergue in office – whether Parliament liked it or not. The Fascist Leagues had become an all-important instrument of pressure against Democratic Government.

M. Doumergue, the new Premier, appeared to be well-intentioned at first. But as time went on the goodness of his intentions became more and more doubtful; and in the end he became altogether impossible; – impossible as a 'National' Premier who, on taking office, had proclaimed a 'party truce'. And in the end it became only too apparent that he and 'the Street' had been working hand-in-hand.

On the face of it, his government was at first merely one of those National Governments that are formed in France in moments of crisis, when everything else fails. To the Radicals it was the 'lesser evil'; the greater evil would have been a non-parliamentary government arising straight from the February 6 riots. This government was also a product of the riots; – but an indirect one. On the face of it, it was little different from, say, the Poincaré Government of 1926, which 'saved the franc'. It was a Coalition Government stretching from the Right to the Neo-Socialists, and comprising a large number of old – and even very old – and experienced politicians. M. Doumergue himself, and M. Chéron as Minister of Justice, and M. Albert Sarraut at the Interior, and M. Germain Martin, M. Herriot's former finance minister, in the same post, and M. Flandin at the Ministry of Public Works, and M. Barthou (who seemed even *too* pre-War) at the Quai

d'Orsay; and M. Laval at the Ministry of Colonies; and old Louis Marin as Minister of Health; and M. Piétri at the Ministry of Marine; – all these people had been on the government bench time and again. The aged Marshal Pétain – a national hero – was appointed Minister of War, and General Denain Minister of Air; and the harmonious unity of the Cabinet was symbolised by its two Ministers of State – M. Herriot, the Radical leader, and M. Tardieu, the outstanding figure among the Nationalists.

It looked a sound normal government such as had already been seen before. Some of the younger people – particularly those who had fought on the Concorde Bridge on February 6 – felt that it contained rather too many moth-eaten old fogies; for the only concession M. Doumergue had made to the 'new spirit' was the appointment of M. Marquet to the Ministry of Labour, and of M. Rivollet, the Secretary-General of the National Union of Ex-servicemen to the Ministry of Pensions. Like Pétain and Denain, Rivollet was not a member of Parliament, and he was supposed to represent the 'live forces of the country' in the government. As for M. Marquet, the ex-dentist of Bordeaux, who had been so offensive to M. Léon Blum before leaving the Socialist Party, he was believed by some to be a man of the future. With his abrupt manner and fierce look, and Hitler moustache, Marquet had – so it was believed – the making of a Fascist leader. 'Order – Authority – Nation,' he had declared at the Socialist Congress; and a *Times* headline had proclaimed him the leader of the French Nazis. In actual practice he was not a leader of anything; and was deserted, soon after joining the Doumergue Government, even by his colleagues in the Neo-Socialist Party. Léon Daudet in the *Action Française* nicknamed him *Néo-Dentiste*. It was unkind; and – like many other nicknames coined by the Royalist leader – very damaging.

In short, *la jeunesse* was not greatly impressed by the new government, and the Socialists would have nothing to do with it. As for the Communists, they succeeded admirably in depriving the first meeting of the Chamber under the new government of all its solemnity. They constantly interrupted Doumergue's Ministerial Declaration by calling him an

assassin – and one Communist called him 'the new Joan of Arc'.

Doumergue did not like it, and developed an intense hatred for Communists and Socialists alike. He had made up his mind to be treated as a national hero; and the Communists were spoiling everything.

The man was mediocre and vain. He had lived for seventy-two years without striking anybody as being a great man. His whole career had been made in the lobbies of the Chamber and Senate. He owed everything to Parliament – and, one might say, to the seamy side of Parliament, – that seamy side against which the rioters of February 6 had rebelled. For years he had belonged to the Radical Party; he had been a Freemason, and the art of parliamentary intrigue was no secret to him. He was Premier for a short time before the War; but did not distinguish himself by anything in particular; in 1917 he went to Russia and declared, a fortnight before the February Revolution that the Tsarist régime had never been more solid and more popular; he also concluded with the Tsarist Government a secret treaty, behind Lord Milner's back, about Constantinople and the Rhineland; which made him unpopular with the British Government. Then he followed the ordinary routine of many a second-rate politician. At sixty-two he was elected President of the Senate, and when Millerand was forced to resign from the Presidency of the Republic, after the 1924 election, in the course of which he had been guilty of grossly unconstitutional behaviour, Doumergue became, almost automatically, by the pure force of circumstances, President of the Republic. During his *septennat* (1924–31) he made himself superficially popular by always appearing on photographs and at public ceremonies with a broad grin on his face. He came to be known as Gastounet, and was the subject of good-natured jokes in the cabarets of Montmartre. During the financial crisis of 1925–6 he intrigued against the Left, and made every effort to bring Poincaré back into power; but all that happened behind the scenes, and was not generally known. Later he also intrigued against Briand; but never very openly. A week before his term of office expired he got married to an old friend of his; the lady, it was said, had insisted upon being married then,

and not a week later, in order to be 'La Présidente', and possibly with an eye on an eventual pension. Not that Doumergue was in need of a pension. For no sooner had he retired from public life than he became a director of the Suez Canal Company with a salary of something like 600,000 francs a year. (The Communists never failed to rub it in, whenever Doumergue tried to impersonate a frugal Cincinnatus.)

It was thought at the time that Doumergue had retired to Tournefeuille, his country house near Toulouse, for good. But when, towards the end of 1933, the political crisis became acute, his name suddenly reappeared in the Right-Wing Press, which began to boost him, at first vaguely, and then openly, as a possible 'saviour' of France. Poincaré was a hopeless invalid; Millerand totally discredited for the Premiership, and the only ex-President of the Republic available in a great emergency requiring for the Premiership a prominent 'above-party' personality with the air of a 'grand old man', was Doumergue. Actually he was old rather than grand; but his grandness was soon manufactured by the Press, and on January 21 he himself came out openly in the Press through an interview with *Paris-Soir* – in which he deplored the various shortcomings of the existing parliamentary system, declared the Stavisky Affair to be a 'crystallisation' of all France's troubles, and proposed all kinds of improvements. He was now clearly 'in the run'. When Chautemps resigned on January 25, President Lebrun offered the Premiership to Doumergue; but the latter must have thought that the time was not yet ripe. He waited until the situation had become really dramatic – so that his reappearance in Paris could create the maximum effect. He expected gratitude and adoration. He wanted to be a national hero. And it was not a role that suited this old politician.

His severe paternal tone – in spite of occasional touches of *bonhomie* – irritated many people; and his belief in his own indispensability, and his constant threats to 'return to Tournefeuille' soon got on the nerves of Parliament. It decided that it would stick this patronising attitude as long as Doumergue was really 'indispensable' – but no longer. How indispensable was he really? It is probable that there would have been serious trouble if he had 'returned to Tournefeuille' before

July. For until July there was still a widespread belief that Doumergue stood for 'national unity', and that if he was irritating at times it was due to certain unfortunate mannerisms that he could not help. After all, it was argued, the old man had rendered the country a service by saving the situation in February; and had, after all, a right to be pleased with himself.

During the first half of 1934 the country was also in an acute state of 'nerves', and could hardly have stood the shock of a first-class political crisis that would have followed Doumergue's departure. The death of Prince, the Paris Magistrate, who was found dead on the railway line near Dijon on February 21, was exploited by the Press of the Right with an unscrupulousness that exceeded even the worst excesses of their Stavisky campaign. Prince had been at the head of the Parquet, the Public Prosecutor's office, which was responsible for the lenient treatment Stavisky had received during his seven years of *liberté provisoire*, in the course of which his trial was postponed nineteen times. Pressard, the Public Prosecutor, was the brother-in-law of Chautemps; and when Prince's dismembered body, with one leg tied to the rails, and a knife lying by his side, and a narcotic in his stomach, was discovered, the Press of the Right immediately declared that Prince had been murdered in this horrible manner by a gang in the service of Chautemps and Pressard, because Prince, they said, knew all about Pressard's role in the handling of the Stavisky Affair. He had been lured to Dijon from Paris, and put to death. Prince, in short, was the eagle eye of the Parquet, the avenging angel of law and justice. At the Salon des Humoristes that year, and in many illustrated papers there were dozens of pictures showing Chautemps and Pressard driving an engine over the bloody remains of Prince.

Subsequent inquiries not only proved conclusively that Prince was anything but a *magistrat intègre* and that he had very good reasons to be afraid of being shown up; but they also left no doubt that the 'luring' to Dijon and his 'murder' had been staged by himself. In doing so he may have thought of saving his family from disgrace and from being deprived of a pension; he may also have wanted to clear his own name and play a trick on Pressard. The case for the suicide version

is overwhelming; the murder theory has not a single solid argument.

Yet at the end of February, before all the details of Prince's sudden departure for Dijon were known, it looked like a case of murder, and M. Sarraut, the Minister of the Interior, and M. Chéron, the Minister of Justice, both alleged that a *maffia* had murdered Prince. And even afterwards, when it was becoming clearer every day that Prince had committed suicide, the government still persisted in calling it murder. Léon Daudet said that there would have been a rebellion if they had *dared* to defy public opinion by calling it suicide. The 'blackmail of the street' was functioning to its full capacity.

By this time the Press had proclaimed under full-page headlines that the *maffia* had murdered Prince. Writers of detective stories were sent to Dijon and into the 'underworld' of Paris to outdo each other in sensational revelations about the *maffia*. But oddly enough, whenever a paper hired a real detective, it never published his report. The *Matin* was the first to send a professional detective to Dijon, and he at once concluded that Prince had committed suicide. His report, though announced in advance, was not published. *Paris-Soir* went one better. Under headlines bigger than would be used if a world war broke out, it announced that it had engaged the three greatest detectives of Scotland Yard to make an independent investigation into the Prince murder, – Sir Basil Thompson, Inspector Wensley and Inspector Collins. But, after nearly doubling its circulation as a result it finally failed to publish their report. And when it sent another detective to Dijon, and the man returned a verdict of suicide, the editor of the paper refused to publish his report, and told him curtly 'I must have a murder – suicide is no good for circulation.' (Parliamentary inquiry into the Stavisky affair.)

For several months Paris was being worked up into a state of frenzy over the murder of Prince. It was only too clearly a political campaign directed against Chautemps and Pressard, and, by implication, against the Radical Party, and the Left in general. Certain magistrates like M. Lescouvé, who had drawn up reports on the Stavisky affair favourable to Pressard while Chautemps was in office, now insinuated that Prince had been murdered.

M. Doumergue did nothing to stop not only the *maffia* stories in the Press which were rapidly endangering the sanity of Paris, but also the savage campaigns in the Right-Wing Press against the Radical Ministers in his own Cabinet. The 'Party truce' was non-existent. But with public opinion in Paris in such a state, the Radicals could do nothing. The two milliards of fresh economies were voted without a murmur in March; for the Radicals could not afford at that time to let Doumergue 'return to Tournefeuille'. The memories of February 6 were still fresh; the Croix de Feu were gaining in strength, and the Press missed no opportunity to suggest that if Doumergue went, there would be another and 'more decisive' 6th of February.

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During those first few months of the Doumergue régime the Croix de Feu were rapidly becoming a vital force in France. Many of the young men who joined it during those months were idealists. The 6th of February had a terribly seamy side to it – Chiappe, and the Banks, and the Press, who were determined to throw out the Radicals and Socialists. But it had its noble side – the youth who thought in all sincerity that they were fighting for a 'cleaner and better France'. And during the months that followed the 6th of February Colonel de la Rocque discovered a *mystique* that appealed to the best instincts of the Conservative youth of France – the *mystique ancien combattant* – the *mystique* of the disinterested man ready to sacrifice himself for his country, as against the low instincts of the 'parliamentary profiteers' who served themselves, and not the country. Those Croix de Feu meetings in 1934 had a fine human quality. I take the following extracts from a description I gave of a Croix de Feu meeting in the Bal Bullier in June 1934.

> 'Their meeting in the Bal Bullier on June 29 was another demonstration of strength. The two largest halls in Paris – the Salle Wagram and the Magic City – were also filled with Croix de Feu that night. None of them wore uniforms, but there was an unmistakable air of military discipline in the crowd. The people were neither rowdy nor stupid like the Solidarité Française. They were earnest, well-disciplined and, on the whole, decent-looking people. The elder men, the real Croix de Feu, wore tricolour armlets decorated with a fiery

cross with a skull in the centre. The young men wore armlets with F.C.F.; these were the sons of the Croix de Feu. There were also thousands of other people, who were merely 'adherents' or 'sympathisers'.

What class did these people belong to? Except for a few ostentatiously proletarian-looking old men – some of them with wooden legs – stationed in front of the platform, nearly all these people were middle class and, I should say, upper middle class. The young people were of the *fils de famille* or University student type – a well-dressed and a well-washed crowd.

The first speaker was a fat man, looking like a successful bank manager, who began by saying that his hair was not as grey nor his belly as fat when War broke out. The people in the rear talked at that time about the Russians at the gates of Berlin and believed that one could capture a German by tempting him with a jam bun. 'No,' said the fat man, 'the War was something different. And after the War came the post-War bunk that was even worse than the War bunk: *Ils ont des droits sur nous*, "Germany will pay"; Herriot and the *mère malade* (who had become *malade* because he had poisoned her with two years of Cartel Government). Shall we go on swallowing this verbiage? No. We've had enough of it.'

'That is why the Croix de Feu was founded. The *bourrage de crâne*, all the lies, all the bunk must stop. We want to know *why* we are to make more sacrifices in future. We are not going to allow others to enrich themselves at our expense any longer. We have been reading every day reports of the Stavisky Committee; and we still do not know who the real culprits are. We want to know now. The country knows nothing.'

There were other speakers, including a woman, the daughter of a Croix de Feu man who had been injured on February 6, and a little man with glasses – the Propaganda Chief, with a snappy manner reminiscent of Dr. Goebbels. They all spoke on the same lines. They spoke about recruiting new members among the working classes; the Communist Party, they said, was a gang of criminals – *qui se ressemble, s'assemble*; there might be some good fellows among them, but they must be won over, and effective resistance against the Communists must be organised; the friends of Stavisky and the murderers of Prince were still living on the fat of the land; Freemasonry was a plague; when all culprits were punished, the Constitution must be revised; a pure wind had passed over France on February 6; the voice of France must be heard; a change had come over France since February 6, when the Croix de Feu saved the country. And so on, and so on. And the Goebbels of the Croix de Feu told a story of how his men had ostentatiously walked away from a war memorial ceremony at Rouen, just as the Mayor of Rouen had opened his mouth to speak. He

was one of the 214 signatories of a Democratic Manifesto published shortly after February 6. 'But he will now realise,' Goebbels said, 'that something important happened on February 6.'

And then there was a sudden commotion in the audience, 'La Rocque! La Rocque! La Rocque!' Pushing his way through the crowd La Rocque stepped briskly on to the platform. He greeted the audience with a charming smile and a wave of the hand. He was far less like Hitler than like a lieutenant of the *Ancien Régime*. Uncle Toby must have met many men in Flanders who looked like La Rocque. Such was the first impression of the *Chef* of the Croix de Feu.

He was not an orator: '*Mesdames, Mesdemoiselles, mes chers amis*,' he began, 'I am glad to see that so many of you have come. I have just been to the Magic City and to the Salle Wagram. We did not advertise our meeting. All of you came spontaneously, like Frenchmen (?). The moment a Frenchman joins the Croix de Feu he loses the habit of putting on his bedroom slippers.'

He then spoke of the United Socialist and Communist Front. 'Moscow, Freemasonry, and perhaps foreign Governments are at the back of it. They are trained by foreigners and by apaches. Or by people who are both foreigners and apaches. (Laughter.) The rank and file of the United Front and of Bergery's Front Commun are merely unhappy and disgruntled people. But their leaders have hidden from them the true radiance of the French star.'

This last phrase looks sentimental and Paul-Boncourish on paper. But La Rocque spoke in a matter-of-fact, staccato, slightly raspy voice like a man giving orders to his soldiers.

'You are Frenchmen of the front line. You must know that you belong to an immense force, independent of any party. Before there is a new order of things, an end must be put to disorder, and the idea of authority must be restored. The men of the United Front who call us rioters, reason like Asiatics. We stand above little party combinations and electoral intrigues. We are patriots among patriots, *nous sommes des sociaux parmi les sociaux*. All that I want to tell you is this: be on your guard, always be ready to do your duty. Your duty is to serve France. Do it without any personal ambition, in the name of honour and security, for your own sake and for the sake of your children.'

When La Rocque had finished his speech, the audience stood up and sang the Marseillaise, and the Madelon, the song that the *poilus* had sung in Flanders, on the Somme, at Verdun. There was no loud cheering, no 'tremendous ovation' (to use the newspaper cliché) at the end. They left the hall calmly, quietly, conscious of their importance.[1]

[1] *France in Ferment*, p. 275-7.

Those were the heroic days of the Croix de Feu. After the resignation of the Daladier Government – under the pressure of 'the street' – Colonel de la Rocque had wired to the local Croix de Feu federations: 'First objective attained. Keep on your guard.' What the second objective was to be nobody quite knew; but there were many young men, who had their heads broken in the Place de la Concorde, fighting thoughtlessly and spontaneously 'against the deputies', and who must have been disappointed – not that they knew exactly what they would have preferred instead – when the Daladier Government they had driven out, was only replaced, two days later, by a government presided over by an old politician of seventy-two.

Colonel de la Rocque tried to console them. He treated the Doumergue Government as 'a poultice on a gangrenous leg' – as a temporary solution to be followed, before long, by a better and more complete solution. He came to be regarded by many of these young men as the torchbearer of a 'better, cleaner France'. In his speeches in 1934 he treated the politicians, as already shown, as the profiteers of the Régime, and the Socialists and Communists as the Arch Enemy. The Croix de Feu movement, with its spirit of the Trenches – *l'esprit Ancien Combattant* – (and La Rocque was a distinguished *ancien combattant* himself) – stood for disinterested service to France. The men who risked their lives in the War must at least have a say in running the country. La Rocque's 'sixteen years of profiteering' was not unlike Hitler's 'fourteen years of Shame'. He had no clear programme, but said that there was no need for any.[1] A *mystique* was more important; and a *mystique* he had undoubtedly created. And there were some young men in the movement, who scarcely hesitated to call themselves openly Fascists.

During 1934 the Croix de Feu became the rallying-point for the Conservative youth of France. The old and select ex-servicemen's organisation was enlarged by affiliated bodies, like the Volontaires Nationaux, which gave an opening to the

[1] Later he assembled his ideas in a book called *Service Public* – a collection of platitudes with a vaguely Fascist and 'Corporatist' tinge. A number of ideas like the 'family vote' had also been borrowed from the Royalists. La Rocque, whose brother is an A.D.C. to the Duc de Guise, was suspected by many of being Royalist rather than Fascist in sympathy.

young. The organisation of the *dispos* (short for *disponibles*) – young men ready at a moment's notice to carry out La Rocque's orders – laid the foundations for those 'lightning mobilisations' which became the regular practice of the Croix de Feu in 1935, and alarmed the Left so much.

The membership of the Croix de Feu increased during the months that followed the 6th of February, to about 100,000; – though this membership was then still chiefly confined to Paris – and the movement soon promised to become by far the most important Fascist force in the country, and reduced the rival Fascist forces – the Jeunesses Patriotes, the Solidarité Française – as well as the Royalist (who, it must be said, had played a far more active part in the street rioting of February 6) to comparative insignificance. The Croix de Feu was promising to become the leading Fascist organisation, with all the others becoming no more than potential auxiliaries.

In public La Rocque used to treat Doumergue with some disdain. But in reality, his relations with Doumergue were much closer than was generally known at the time; and it was not until the great constitutional conflict of September–November 1934 that it became apparent to what extent Doumergue had tried to use La Rocque as an instrument of pressure against a rebellious Chamber and Senate.

CHAPTER V

THE DOUMERGUE–TARDIEU PLOT AGAINST THE REPUBLIC

WITH A FEW DRY DETAILS ON FRENCH CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

THE Stavisky Affair had shown – though for political reasons it was given a hundred times more publicity than many bigger scandals of the past in which the Right were involved – that there was something far wrong in France. It had shown that both the police and the judiciary had been guilty of incompetence and some corruption; and that certain deputies, as well as a large number of newspapers, had played an unenviable role in the adventurer's progress. The parliamentary system seemed discredited, and appeared to call for drastic reforms, and, in taking office the Doumergue Government had promised such reforms. In March, a Parliamentary Committee, including several Radicals, had approved, by a large majority, but hurriedly and thoughtlessly, certain constitutional reforms, including one strengthening the Prime Minister's powers and prerogatives. This rather weakened their position in their subsequent conflict with Doumergue. But it should be emphasised that if the Radicals rebelled against Doumergue in October, after approving several of his reforms 'in principle' earlier in the year, it was not because they suddenly began to consider the principle of these reforms entirely wrong, but because, by that time, Doumergue and the people behind him (Tardieu and the Croix de Feu) had become definitely suspect in their eyes. They also realised on second thoughts that the Doumergue reforms had little bearing on the evils revealed by the Stavisky Affair; and that they aimed at something different.

At the time (if not to this day), the French Constitutional conflict of September–November 1934, was grossly misunderstood abroad. Under the influence of the French Right-Wing Press, there was a widespread belief among foreign commenta-

tors that Doumergue was trying to improve French democratic methods; and even so excellent a journalist as Mr. Vernon Bartlett, went so far as to proclaim Doumergue the Great Defender of French Democracy against the selfish, intriguing politicians. No doubt he had a soft spot for Doumergue. For Doumergue was indeed the first French Premier to have adopted the wireless as his means of communicating with the Nation – (over the heads of Parliament and even of his own Cabinet, one may add). It was in his fifth broadcast, on September 24, that Doumergue communicated to the Nation his proposed constitutional reforms. He had not previously informed the Cabinet of what he was proposing to say 'to the Nation'.

Doumergue's first broadcasts had amused 'the Nation'. They smiled good-naturedly at his rather ridiculous Southern accent, at his paternal airs, at his sentimental descriptions of how he had left Tournefeuille to come to Paris to save France from civil war. To mimic Doumergue's voice with its *mes ché-érrs amis* and *cette ché-ére Frrannce* had become the ambition of every café wit. (Which shows, incidentally, that his warm wireless outpourings were not taken unduly seriously.) But in time, his broadcasts began to get on 'the Nation's' nerves – especially when the honey of his virtuously senile patriotism began to be mingled with the vinegar of party spite. Towards the end of September the invaluable *Canard Enchainé* printed a picture of a man ordering a wireless set in a shop: 'When is M. Doumergue speaking?' he asked the assistant.

'On Wednesday night, sir.'

'Then be *sure* to deliver it on Thursday morning.'

The fifth 'Discourse to the Nation' incorporating Doumergue's constitutional proposals, was the most typical of Doumergue's broadcasts – it contained all his stock arguments of how he had saved France in a spirit of self-sacrifice, and of how the Socialists and Communists had become *the* enemy. It was not until the seventh Discourse – which he made a few days before his fall – that the Radicals also received their due share of his detestation.

The fifth Discourse began *moderato*, with the usual touches of communion between the great man and *his* people:

Mes chers concitoyens,

It is a long time since I last spoke to you. Do not think that I have forgotten you.(!) My thoughts always travel towards you, for I feel that you are my strength; and I must feel this in order to accomplish my task, which is a hard one. I know your great desire and your great need to see the general situation improve as rapidly as possible. . . . Unfortunately I have no magician's wand to change the situation at a moment's notice.

Every day brings us some new difficulties. When one thing gets settled, something else gets unsettled. There are always people about ready to upset things. I know it from my own experience. But do not imagine that I have lost courage. There are some who will tell you that I wish to remain in office because I like it. Those who are yearning for power themselves attribute such motives to me.

There followed the familiar suggestion that in keeping in office, he was making a great sacrifice for the country's benefit:

'I have no desire to remain in office. If I questioned myself properly, I would rather find the opposite desire. And I have even less liking for what is called "politics". If I wish to remain in power longer than I expected when I agreed to form the government, it is because I wish to submit to you a programme of reforms and measures which appear to me to be urgent and indispensable.'

But before coming to his 'programme' Doumergue went on to review the government's work, since its formation on February 9, and to paint lurid pictures of what would have happened had he not saved France at the last moment:

'The results,' he said, 'of the government's work are not negligible. To realise their importance one must try to imagine what would have happened if the government, which I had the honour of forming, had not put an end to the riots and prevented civil war, which in turn would have brought on an international war.

'One must also try to imagine what would have happened if the Budget had not been balanced a little better than it was in February; the public services would have functioned very badly; the officials would have received only half their wages and the pensioners even less. What would have happened if the fiscal reform [the budget cuts] had not been adopted in time; if we had not obtained from Parliament ten milliard francs for a public works programme [the "Marquet" plan] which will reduce, in a short time, the number of unemployed?'

And then, alluding to Barthou's international policy, Doumergue said that the authority and prestige of France had been enormously strengthened in the last six months. (This, in a sense, was true.)

> 'If I had wished to do so,' he continued, 'I could have said that my task was at an end and that I could retire. I tell you frankly that I had a great desire to do it. The results I achieved allowed me to return for good to my rural retreat, and to wait there, far from the intrigues of the political parties, for the hour that none can escape. But I did not yield to temptation. Was I right? Was I wrong? I shall know later. . . . While Parliament was on vacation I spent my time working. By remaining in office I also had a chance of keeping an eye on the manœuvres calculated to shake your confidence and to hamper the fruitful effects of the work we have done.'

The anti-Socialist and anti-Communist theme now came out *fortissimo*. It was a reference to the Front Commun pact signed by the Socialists and Communists on July 27:

> 'A campaign is in progress in favour of devaluation – a campaign which, if successful, would be a disaster for France. This campaign was already conducted in the past by the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. These parties, which fought against each other rather violently in the past have now united. This union has shaken confidence and has aggravated the tendency to hoard. But, taken by itself, I think the event is a happy one. For now a dangerous misunderstanding has been cleared up. The situation is clear at last. It has now been publicly admitted *that Socialism and Communism are exactly the same thing*.'

M. Doumergue did not hesitate to deduce from this that the Socialists and Communists were the enemies of France, and that, by favouring devaluation they were deliberately planning the total ruin of the French people, to be followed by a bloody revolution and an international war.

> 'Through the ruin of the franc the new Socialist-Communist Party [there was actually no such party] is certain to lead us to general ruin. It is convinced that it can best build up its dictatorship on these ruins. . . . The rentier's investments will be reduced to zero. . . . The workman's wages will be reduced to zero. . . . Agriculture will be reduced to zero. . . . The fifty-nine milliards in the savings banks will be reduced to zero. . . . The famous woollen stocking – which makes some foreigners laugh because they are envious of it – would also be reduced to zero.'

There was also a passing reference to M. Paul Reynaud, whose devaluationist campaign was 'a precious auxiliary' for the Socialist-Communist conspiracy. (Actually there was no such conspiracy against the franc.)

In the art of misrepresentation, Monsieur Doumergue fully rivalled Herr Hitler. Only his audience was not a gullible German audience.

He then came to his precious constitutional reforms:

> 'The most urgent thing, in the present régime, and especially in the present circumstances, is to have an authoritative government. We have none. There may be some among you who will say that, in a parliamentary and democratic régime there cannot be a government with authority. I do not agree with this.'

The voice sounded sweet through the ether:

> 'I am devoted to this régime. . . . I know its drawbacks, but I also know its advantages. I love liberty. Across the Channel there is a great country that is our friend. For a very long time it has lived under Parliamentary Government. Its governments, to whatever party they may belong, are endowed with great authority. Do you know why? It is because their leader has the power of a leader. He is called the Prime Minister – the first Minister; – and he is the First Minister. This leader and his government, in taking office, are certain of a long existence. Hence their authority. They are also certain of having a budget in time; and in this budget only expenditure proposed by the government itself is incorporated. It is also certain that its officials are well disciplined, and that a rebellion of the officials against the State would not be easily tolerated. . . . Nor have the magistrates in England any connection with politics – which is the only means of achieving equal justice for all.
>
> 'In France the head of the government, who is called the *Président du Conseil*, is a mere fiction. He has no special authority, and is not mentioned in the Constitution. Both legally and in fact he is like any other Minister, with insufficient authority over Parliament.
>
> 'In our country governments do not live long. They have no homogeneous majority; for there are too many parties. They can be overthrown for the slightest reason; and nothing ever happens to those who indulge in such massacres.
>
> 'There were six governments in twenty months before the 6th of February. . . . You know how in the end the general public rebelled against this state of affairs.'

Further, M. Doumergue said, the Budget was seldom voted

in time, and contained a great deal of expenditure, unnecessary in the opinion of the government, that had been proposed by private members; worse still, a large part of the government officials thought they had a right to go on strike.

Here then were his proposals, the first of which, at any rate, was six weeks later, to break up the 'National' Government:

> 'Let us give the government authority,' he said, 'by inserting a few words in the Constitution, which would endow the head of the government with the title and rights of Prime Minister. Let us allow the Prime Minister, when the government is in disagreement with the majority of the Chamber, to appeal immediately to the country without having to go through the present formalities and procedure. [What he meant was that the Premier should be able, on his own authority, to dissolve the Chamber.] A slight modification in the Constitution will be sufficient; – except in a few clearly specified cases, when the preliminary authority of the Senate, which has rendered the Republic such great services, will be necessary. You can be sure that Cabinet crises will become rare when the fear of immediate dissolution will put the brake on impatient and usually unjustifiable ambitions, which are more frequently at the root of such crises than a conflict of principles and ideas.'

Further, M. Doumergue proposed that the government alone should have the initiative of proposing expenditure; that the new Budget, if not voted before December 31, should be passed by government decree (this 'decree' Budget of the following year being the same as that of the current year); and that the government officials who were 'a privileged class, protected against all economic uncertainty' be forbidden to belong to trade unions, to strike, or to indulge in any kind of political agitation against the State.

In his sixth Discourse to the Nation, on October 4, M. Doumergue promised to produce a number of proposals concerning the reform of the judiciary. But most of his speech was merely a harangue against the Front Commun. He (Doumergue) had offered the Socialist leader (Blum) a seat in the government, which he was forming in the hope of bringing all Frenchmen together and of so avoiding civil war.

> 'He refused my offer ; and I regretted it; for I made my offer in all sincerity. But I concluded from his refusal that the Socialist–Communist alliance was close at hand. I was not mistaken.'

After enumerating all the horrors of a Socialist-Communist Government, Doumergue concluded, almost hysterically: 'How can we avoid dictatorship and civil war? It is quite simple. The Union of all Frenchmen, except the Front Commun and its naïve sympathisers, has become indispensable. Without such a union nothing can succeed.' In short, Doumergue, in his defence of 'the liberties of your fathers', was outlawing the Socialists and Communists. The Fascists were not even mentioned, they were classed, by implication, among the defenders of freedom. Doumergue's outburst against the Front Commun was like a parody of Hitler denouncing *Marxismus*.

The French were not deceived by his sloppy references to democracy, liberty, 1789 and all that.

But what roused the storm in the first place was the proposal concerning the Prime Minister's prerogatives. The idea was not new. The main lines of the proposal – like most of Doumergue's other proposals – were to be found in Tardieu's book, *L'Heure de la Décision*, published earlier in the year; and this in turn was an adaptation of certain proposals published, two years earlier, by Senator Maurice Ordinaire, in a book prefaced by M. Doumergue himself. But what puzzled many people was Doumergue's (and also Tardieu's) claim that the plan had been borrowed from the British Constitution.

The most apt criticism on the subject came from England, and was extensively reproduced in the Left Press. It was a letter in the *Manchester Guardian* of September 29, 1934, by Mr. Ivor Jennings, who wrote:

> M. Doumergue, in his broadcast on the reform of the French Constitution, showed a complete misunderstanding of the working of the British Cabinet. He is asking for powers which no British Prime Minister has ever had.
>
> In the first place, it is the business of the Cabinet, not of the Prime Minister, to advise a dissolution. Moreover, where the Cabinet decides on dissolution the King can insist on a formal minute. . . . The question has not appeared important in England, because normally the Cabinet is homogeneous, and the Prime Minister has either to agree with his Cabinet or break up his party. If we were as accustomed to coalitions as are the people of France we should recognise the importance of the distinction. For it is easy to imagine circumstances in which a Prime Minister of a Coalition could, by a timely

dissolution, strengthen his own party at the expense of the parties of his colleagues.

In the second place, the Prime Minister of the Cabinet has no *right* of dissolution. . . . The fact that the present King granted a dissolution to Mr. MacDonald in 1924 is no more a proof of such a right than the fact that Queen Victoria granted a dissolution to Lord Derby in 1859. It would certainly be a dangerous doctrine that the Prime Minister of a Coalition Government could, without his colleagues' consent, demand and insist upon a dissolution. The justification for any action of his lies in the majority which he and his colleagues possess in the House of Commons. He has no personal authority except the support of the Cabinet. The justification of the King's discretion lies in his assumed impartiality in party questions.

The strength of the British Government, so far as it exists, does not lie, as M. Doumergue appears to think, in the powers of the Prime Minister, but in the support of a reasonably homogeneous party. That support is in part maintained by the prorogative of dissolution; but only because the existence of two or three large parties usually creates a strict alternative between a dissolution and the accession of the opposition. If the present party system were broken into fragments it is clear that the King would have to exercise his discretion with care.

I am not arguing, of course, that the power of dissolution is not necessary in France. I suggest only that it must be justified by French conditions and not by false analogies with the British constitution.

The Left Press was delighted. 'M. Doumergue has revised the British Constitution,' the *Œuvre* wrote.[1]

But actually, the juridical incompetence of M. Doumergue worried the French less than the question: What is he up to? To the Left he was suspect – enormously suspect.

They poured ridicule on his broadcast talks. The *Canard* published a picture entitled 'Preparing for to-night's Discourse', and showing a block of flats with wireless sets being hurled out of every window into the dustbins below.

But the controversy that was set loose by the broadcast of September 24 was interrupted for about a fortnight by the assassination at Marseilles on October 9 of King Alexander of Jugoslavia and M. Barthou, the French Foreign Minister,

[1] A few months later, in a lecture in Paris, Sir John Simon demonstrated to a startled French audience which had heard from M. Doumergue all about the virtues of the British Constitution, that constitutionally the British Prime Minister was just as non-existent as was the French *Président du Conseil*.

and by the internal complications to which it gave rise. There was an inevitable outcry against the alleged negligence the French police had displayed at Marseilles, and M. Sarraut, the Minister of the Interior, who was nominally responsible, was the first to suffer for the 'disgrace' that France had suffered in allowing a friendly sovereign to be assassinated the moment he had landed on French soil. He resigned, and this was taken as an opportunity for also dropping Chéron, the Minister of Justice. It was Marshal Pétain who, at the Cabinet Meeting of October 14, declared – such, at least was the story current in Paris at the time – that before any Cabinet reconstruction could be carried out the Cabinet must get rid of a heavy weight. M. Chéron, an enormously fat man, turned to the Marshal and asked whom exactly he meant. 'You!' the Marshal replied sharply.

Poor Chéron! He had done his best; but had managed to make himself unpopular both with the Right and with the Left – with the Right for not producing his sensational evidence against Left-Wing politicians in his inquiry into the Stavisky Affair; and with the Left for never admitting his error when he said that Prince had been murdered by a *maffia*.

Barthou was replaced at the Quai d'Orsay by Laval, the Minister of Colonies; Sarraut (unlucky man – the next time he was in office he had to deal with Germany's repudiation of Locarno) was replaced by Marchandeau, a Radical who was to support Doumergue to the bitter end; Laval was replaced at the Ministry of Colonies by M. Rollin; but for the thankless post of Minister of Justice Doumergue had every difficulty in the world in finding a successor to the 'heavyweight'.

Owing to his constitutional reforms, the Senate decided to boycott him and his Cabinet, and only after meeting with half a dozen refusals did M. Doumergue finally succeed in securing the services of M. Lémery, a regular contributor to M. Tardieu's organ, the *Liberté* – which was sufficient to rouse still further the suspicions and discontent of the Radicals. In his articles, M. Lémery had been advocating the 'murder theory' in the Prince Affair; – which was hardly a good guarantee of impartiality and open-mindedness in the new Minister of Justice. In the Prince Affair – that modern Dreyfus Case – it

was as bad from the point of view of the Left to uphold the 'murder theory', as it was, in the Dreyfus Affair, to uphold the 'guilt theory'.

The constitutional controversy broke out with renewed violence about October 20, a few days before the opening of the Radical Conference at Nantes. On October 22, M. Doumergue received M. Bienvenu Martin and other prominent representatives of the Left-Wing majority of the Senate, who had come to protest, in the name of France's republican liberties, against his proposed reforms. The meeting was a stormy one; and M. Doumergue lost his temper completely. He had by this time become extremely autocratic, and the slightest criticism made him furious. The Senators argued that there was no valid reason for depriving the Senate of its privileges and for leaving the dissolution of the Chamber to the sole discretion of the Premier, or even of the Premier *and* the President of the Republic. They rightly observed that they had never been asked, since 1877, to sanction the dissolution of the Chamber, and that there was therefore no reason why they should be considered as an obstacle in the way of dissolution.

At the Cabinet Meeting that day, M. Tardieu was alone in supporting Doumergue wholeheartedly against the Senate. In the Chamber lobby the opposition to Doumergue was growing steadily; and the prevalent feeling was that the sooner the old man 'got out' the better it would be.

Apart from Doumergue's conflict with the Senate majority, the most important prelude to the Nantes Congress – a prelude which did perhaps more than anything else to give courage to the Radicals in their struggle against Doumergue, – was a series of articles by M. Blum in the *Populaire* from October 19 to October 24. The Doumergue Government, he said, was in substance a Fascist Government. The Press of the Right was already threatening the Senate with violence if they did not surrender to Doumergue. The Chamber had surrendered in February to the blackmail of the 'street'. Were Doumergue and Tardieu now going to try it out on the Senate?

Blum went on to argue that what Doumergue was proposing was little short of being a Fascist Dictatorship.

'Suppose,' he said, 'M. Tardieu becomes Prime Minister after Doumergue's reforms have been passed, and suppose the Chamber wishes to overthrow his government. But, much as it may wish to do so, it will know that if it does, Tardieu may immediately order a dissolution. Many deputies will think twice before voting against the government – if only because the prospect of fighting a new and costly election campaign against an authoritative government, with secret funds, and the Press and the wireless at its disposal, is not an attractive one. Many of them have not even paid their expenses for their last election. And what guarantee is there that the labour and expenses of a new campaign will not be wasted by the immediate dissolution of the new Chamber – if it does not happen to please M. Tardieu?

'Many a deputy,' M. Blum continued, '*would cease to be free*; for his arguments and feelings for and against the government might be outweighed by personal considerations, which will have no connection with his inner convictions or with his duty towards his constituents. And if individual deputies are no longer free, *Parliament will no longer be free either*. And if there is no free parliament to face a government, there is no parliament. But let us further assume that there is a sufficient number of heroic deputies to overthrow the Tardieu Government. What will the government do in that case? In terms of Article 6 of the Constitutional Law of February 25, 1875, *the government that is overthrown by the Chamber has to resign. Not so if Doumergue's project is voted by the National Assembly. The government that has asked for the dissolution of the Chamber remains in power. In the past the Chamber dismissed a government; now a government will dismiss the Chamber*. I wonder what to call such a régime – I certainly cannot call it a Republic.

'If there were a dissolution under the present system,' M. Blum continued, 'the President of the Republic would nominate, after the overthrow of the government, a new Premier, who would sign the dissolution decree, with the approval of the Senate, and would govern during the transition period.

'What will happen under the new system? Though overthrown by the Chamber, M. Tardieu will remain in office. He will, according to M. Doumergue's broadcast, dissolve the Chamber himself, or (if we accept the *Temps* "interpretation" – though it has never been subscribed to by M. Doumergue himself) he will get the President of the Republic to dissolve it. The President can no more refuse than he can refuse to appoint a government official to a new post. The Senate is reduced to silence. (We Socialists are in favour of abolishing the Senate:[1]

[1] A point worth remembering in connection with the conflict between the Blum Government and the Senate in 1936.

but that is beside the point in the present controversy.) Thereupon M. Tardieu will conduct his election campaign, complete with prefects, Press, wireless and secret funds. *There will be only two categories of candidates – his friends and his enemies.* The General Election will have become a plebiscite for or against a Person. The essential notions of Democracy will be cast aside.

'Why,' M. Blum said in conclusion, 'is the adventure of May 16, 1877, described in history as a *coup d'état*? Was it because MacMahon dissolved the Chamber? Surely not. The dissolution procedure was perfectly legal. *The reason why it was deservedly called a coup d'état was that the Marshal dismissed a government – the Jules Simon Cabinet – with a majority at the Chamber, and because, after the dissolution, he maintained in office the Broglie-Fourtou Cabinet which had been condemned by the chosen representations of the people. Further, he gave the subsequent election campaign the appearance of a plebiscite – in which the electorate was asked to choose between the majority of the Cabinet and himself.* In the "reformed State" of MM. Doumergue and Tardieu such a *coup de force* after the manner of May 16, 1877, would become the normal method of government. This government would cease to be parliamentary. Such a State would cease to be a Republic.'

Blum is a great journalist, and the effect of his articles and of the analogy he drew between Doumergue and Marshal MacMahon, who had been for sixty years the bogy man of every good French republican, was overwhelming on all Left-Wing opinion – and particularly on the Radical Congress that met at Nantes a few days later.[1] They were, in fact, written for the benefit of this Congress.

The Doumergue reforms were in the centre of all the discussions. The overwhelming majority of the Congress was intensely hostile to Doumergue; and Herriot looked worried and uncertain. He was afraid of a Fascist riot, and thought Doumergue's departure at the present time, 'extremely undesirable', and he still hoped that a compromise might be reached

[1] In the opinion of some jurists I have consulted, it is not absolutely certain that Blum's case against MacMahon was juridically irreproachable. The Jules Simon Government was not exactly 'dismissed' by MacMahon, but resigned after receiving an insulting letter from the President. Was this letter strictly 'illegal'? Secondly, was it illegal to maintain in office the Broglie Government after it had received a vote of censure from the Chamber? On the face of it, this government should have resigned; but since there must be *some* government to carry on after the dissolution of the Chamber, is it certain that the Broglie Government should not have remained in office, at least to look after 'current affairs'? The Constitutional Law of 1875 leaves this point obscure. Still, Blum's article, by drawing such a close analogy between Doumergue and MacMahon, achieved the desired result.

which would save the National Government. The majority of the Radicals, though hostile to Doumergue, were prepared to give the negotiations with the Premier another chance. The case for the majority was best stated by M. Guernut: 'I am not hostile to the political truce,' he said, 'and I believe that it is even necessary in certain cases – in the case of financial collapse, in the case of war, in the case of a rebellion against the Republic. But the head of such a Coalition Government must be an impartial arbiter. If he becomes a partisan supporting one part of his Cabinet against another, he must be denounced.

'The Radical Party has allowed its leaders to enter the government. But if I find that this government has gone beyond the limits we have set, I shall not hesitate in helping to overthrow it. I shall know before long whether we have been right in placing our confidence in the men representing us in the government.'

Then came the climax:

'Having said this,' the little white-bearded man continued (the *Echo de Paris* called him *ce petit Landru blanc*) with playful feline gestures, 'I must now turn to you, Président Herriot, and appeal to your Republican conscience. We give you our confidence, but there are limits to the concessions you may make. You must be the sentry on the frontier of the Republic and must let no one pass.' (Loud cheers.)

M. Herriot's reply was a masterpiece of rhetorical acrobatics:

> 'I am not in an enviable position,' he said pathetically. 'I am both the President of your Party and a member of the National Government. How can I reconcile these two functions? To get out of this difficult position I could let you vote a resolution against the party truce. Many of you, no doubt, would vote enthusiastically. But it would be a case of my hiding behind your backs. It would be a simple but a cowardly solution.
>
> 'I must therefore ask you to give your Radical Ministers your confidence, and we shall take upon ourselves all the necessary risks – you may judge us afterwards. But whatever you may think of the party truce, whatever you have suffered under it, I do not want you to break it.'

As regards the personal right of dissolution, M. Herriot said that while he had faith in M. Doumergue personally, the

problem opened up possibilities that might be dangerous to the Republic. 'And the moment will come when the Radical Ministers may have to consult their conscience – and this conscience is the conscience of good Republicans.'

In conclusion M. Herriot said that the Constitution of 1875 had served the Republic well at many difficult moments; – the implication being that he was not favourable to a 'journey to Versailles'.[1] Above all, M. Herriot said, it was necessary to keep calm. 'Remember the Saar Plebiscite takes place on January 13 next. Are you sure there will not be moments when you will require all your calm and level-headedness?

'I need say no more. I am a man who does not leave to chance either his words or his acts. May it be said that, in speaking to the Congress, I have risen above party considerations and have, together with the Congress, kept in mind, above all things, the interests of France and the Republic.' (Prolonged cheers.)

The motion that was carried almost unanimously said, among other things, that 'the Radical Party is ready to associate itself with any reform tending to increase governmental stability and to improve the functioning of the State apparatus, but it cannot endorse any measure which would create personal prerogatives liable to endanger the republican liberties of the country'.

Herriot and the other Radical Ministers returned to Paris, and, day after day, they urged Doumergue to accept a compromise. Various formulae were put forward. Doumergue rejected them all. They were prepared to subscribe even to his proposal concerning the civil service – a proposal which the Socialists considered monstrous, for it took the sting out of the General Strike, the most effective of all anti-Fascist weapons. But nothing short of the Prime Minister's new powers would satisfy Doumergue.

On November 3 he delivered his seventh Discourse to the Nation, full of bitter attacks not only on the Socialists and Communists but on the Radicals as well, and on Parliament as a whole, 'with its everlasting intrigues'. It was full of 'I

[1] The National Assembly which alone can amend the Constitution, and is composed of the Chamber and the Senate sitting together, always meets at Versailles.

desire,' 'I demand,' 'I need;' – it was no longer grandfather talking, but the Master of France. He was going to place his proposals before the Chamber, and he defied it to reject them. And what is more, to protect himself and his precious proposals against obstruction, he was going to demand from the Chamber the immediate vote of three *douzièmes provisoires* (votes on account), which would give the government complete independence for five months (from November to April 1935).

The proposal caused an uproar at the Chamber; not only was the voting of *douzièmes provisoires*, two months before the end of the financial year, contrary to all tradition, and to those methods of sound finance that Doumergue was supposed to defend, but it was an outrage to Parliament. 'If we accept this,' people in the lobbies said, 'we might as well close down altogether. It will be no more honourable to belong to the Chamber of Deputies than to belong to the Fresnes prison. And to think,' they would add, 'that he owes everything, everything to Parliament.'

The Finance Committee also rebelled. The Radical Ministers would not hear of it, and on Monday, November 5, the break-up of the National Government seemed certain.

It was at this point that the *chantage de la rue* – the blackmail of the street – came clearly into play. M. Jean Goy, one of the leaders of a reactionary ex-servicemen's association, and several other less well-known people would go about the Chamber lobbies, whispering mysteriously to anyone who cared to listen, that 'their fellows' were 'itching to come out at any moment'. In short, if Doumergue fell, there would be another 6th of February. And on November 5, M. de Kerillis came out in the *Echo de Paris* with an article entitled *IL LES AURA!!!*:

> 'Pessimists tell me that the Chamber will overthrow him, that the Senate will overthrow him, that the National Assembly will overthrow him. Never, never, never! I shall go on saying and repeating and crying aloud: *they will not dare!* He has got them all in his pocket – for he has the courage to speak to the people against the Ministers, against the Senators, against deputies of Left and Right, against the profiteers, and the blind and the imbeciles, who do not wish to change anything in this house that is crumbling over our ears. . . . They will not dare to go against him, for they have found in him the soul, the

blood and the manner of the old Tiger who saved us from defeat! Those who hate him also fear him, as they fear the Street, and the elections and the crisis and war. . . . Doumergue's victory is certain!'

No, public opinion, hard as M. de Kerillis tried to show, was not behind Doumergue; and it did not feel that he had 'the soul and the blood and the manner of the old Tiger'. It was much more concerned about the economic crisis that Doumergue had done nothing to remedy.

I saw Doumergue at the Chamber on November 6 (it was a purely formal meeting), and again on November 7 when, after a final meeting with the Radicals, he was leaving the Quai d'Orsay in the company of Madame Doumergue. He wore a bowler hat and his nose was red, and he snarled venomously as he got into his car.

On the following day the Radicals sent in their resignation. They called the Fascist bluff. Nothing happened. There were no riots in Paris. Doumergue departed in a frenzy of rage. In a statement to the Press he declared that he had been driven out by 'the men whose policy had led to the riots of last February and to the death of unarmed ex-servicemen' who had demonstrated that day in the Place de la Concorde.

This was a provocation of the worst sort. So much so that even Doumergue felt obliged to issue another statement asking the country to 'keep calm'. Actually, the country was keeping calm, and had no intention of starting a revolution for M. Doumergue's benefit.

MacMahon the Second had failed. As for the Fascists, it was not until three days later that they came out into the street to demonstrate. But they did not demonstrate outside the Chamber, but outside M. Doumergue's house in the Avenue Foch.

It was Armistice Day, and that morning already, in the Place de l'Etoile, several Croix de Feu men had greeted President Lebrun, who had come to lay a wreath on the Unknown Soldier's Grave, with cries of 'Vive Doumergue!' In the evening several thousand members of the Croix de Feu, Jeunesses Patriotes, and Solidarité assembled outside Doumergue's windows and cheered. He appeared on the balcony and pulled

a béret basque – the traditional 'Fascist' headwear – over his senile skull. And Colonel de la Rocque, who had been conversing with him inside the house, came out, together with General Denain, the Minister of Air, and declared: 'It must be known that those guilty of M. Doumergue's departure are criminals in our eyes. Particularly the fat one [Herriot] and the lanky one [Flandin]. We are not threatening anyone, but we are waiting and we shall pass judgment in due course. I had a very cordial meeting with M. Doumergue. *He already received me many times in the past with great benevolence.* We shall remain in touch with him; for the day will come when he can save France for the second time.'

The Colonel let the cat out of the bag. So he *had* been in constant touch with Doumergue; and the Croix de Feu *did* threaten parliament, with Doumergue's knowledge and approval.

A few days later I saw M. Herriot. He recalled La Rocque's words. 'You see how right I was,' he said. 'The Republic *was* in danger. I had to break up the National Government. There was no other choice. The old man had become unbearable. On one occasion he actually spoke to me with great admiration of MacMahon, whose only error, he said, was to have neglected the financial side; as a result of which he had to surrender. I realised what was at the back of Doumergue's mind when he asked for the *douzièmes provisoires. En somme, mon cher, nous avons bien fait de le débarquer.*'

There were some young Croix de Feu men who afterwards claimed that November 8 was the greatest opportunity the Fascists had ever had to march on the Chamber and to seize power, an opportunity that La Rocque had missed.

I doubt whether it was an 'opportunity'. On November 8 a Fascist coup would not have had one-quarter of the popular support that was given to the riots of the 6th of February.

A few days later Doumergue left for Tournefeuille in his car in the middle of the night. A few reporters troubled to follow his car – but not many. He was soon forgotten. The cash-box with the secret funds had passed into other hands, and M. de Kerillis was alone to keep up his lamentations for a while. He started a referendum in the *Echo de Paris*:

REFERENDUM DU PRESIDENT DOUMERGUE

Je soussigné, déclare protester contre le départ du Président Doumergue, victime des Politiciens et des francs-maçons

Nom:.....

Adresse.....

Signature.....

A few weeks later he claimed to have received three million signatures.

But nobody really cared.

Democracy, as M. Blum wrote at the time, had won its first victory over Fascism.

CHAPTER VI

ENTER LAVAL

SIX hours after the resignation of the Doumergue Government, the new government was formed, with M. Pierre Etienne Flandin as Premier. A few days before, he had, as President of the Alliance Démocratique, the principal Centre Party, made a speech at Arras in which he clearly put forward his candidature for the Premiership in the event of a Cabinet crisis.

M. Doumergue's Minister of Public Works not only said that 'all republican forces must rally round a common programme', and paid some warm compliments to the Radicals and to 'their eminent leader', M. Herriot, but also referred with a visible lack of enthusiasm to M. Doumergue's constitutional proposals. He further declared that 'the present atmosphere of civil war in which all sorts of people claim the right to interpret to their own taste "the will of the people", must cease'. It was a clear reference to M. Doumergue's friends, the Croix de Feu. He also clearly suggested that, in his opinion, the economic problems were far more urgent than the constitutional problems; and he advocated a return to 'economic liberalism'.

The *Petit Parisien* of November 5, significantly gave the place of honour on its front page to M. Flandin's speech. He was obviously 'in the running'. He was, in the phrase of Colonel de la Rocque, the 'lanky one' who, together with the 'fat one' (Herriot) had 'betrayed' Doumergue.

Flandin, six foot-four, and 46 years old (he was the Benjamin of the Chamber in 1914) is a *grand bourgeois* and looks like a prosperous business man – and English rather than French. He counts Sir Gomer Berry and other well-known Englishmen among his friends and likes to give himself English airs.

The adjective 'incomplete', that has been applied to him,

is rather apt. One always feels with Flandin that there is 'something lacking'. He has little personality; his speeches are sound and well delivered, but are incapable of stirring the imagination or arousing enthusiasm. They are always a little like the Chairman's speech at a shareholders' meeting. He never sparkles and his pathos – whenever he attempts it – falls flat. Personally, he is courteous and amiable; but he leaves people indifferent. He is colourless. Cartoonists, who can never think of anything better than his long legs, find him heartbreaking.

In the days of Tardieu, M. Flandin, the Minister of Finance, was very unpopular with the Socialists and Communists. He had been legal adviser to the Aéropostale Company, which went into liquidation in rather unfortunate circumstances, and although M. Flandin was not guilty of anything, his association with the company was exploited against him. Whenever Flandin mounted the tribune, a Bolshevik in the Press gallery at the Chamber would hiss and splutter: 'The scccoundrrrel! He will end in j-j-j-ail!' For a long time the Left Press treated 'l'homme de l'Aéropostale' with great irreverence.

But in time they became more lenient towards him – especially since his open breach with Tardieu in 1932. Tardieu was Fascist in temperament; while Flandin was a 'good Republican', and flattered himself to be in the 'great republican tradition' of Waldeck – Rousseau; in short, a French Tory, strictly democratic in outlook, and even with a touch of Liberalism. His drift towards the Left became very apparent towards the end of 1933, when he supported, together with the bulk of the Left Centre, the shortlived Sarraut Government, both against the Right and against the Socialists. He was an advocate of a Concentration government – that is, a Coalition between the Radicals and all the 'sincerely democratic' elements of the Centre (as distinct from the anti-democratic elements of the Right and Right Centre dominated by the financial oligarchy, the Fascist Leagues and, to some extent, by the Church).

Still, in taking office after Doumergue, he did not abandon the 'party truce' formula, and the construction and party composition of his government closely resembled the Doumergue

Cabinet. Louis Marin, the Right-Wing leader, and Herriot were his Ministers of State, symbolising the 'equilibrium' between Right and Left. M. Pernod, a member of the Right, was appointed Minister of Justice (so that the Right could no longer claim that 'Chautemps's friends' were hushing up the Stavisky and Prince Affairs); the wily Mandel, joining any government for the first time, became Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, where, even at the risk of making himself unpopular with the officials, he was to do some useful work, especially in improving the French wireless; M. Régnier (Radical), became Minister of the Interior, M. Germain-Martin Minister of Finance, M. Piétri remained at the Ministry of Marine. General Denain, in spite of his Croix de Feu sympathies, remained Minister of Air; but at the Ministry of War, Marshal Pétain who had refused to continue, was replaced by his protégé, General Maurin. (It was not true, however, as was alleged in the Press of the Right, that he had branded Doumergue's forced resignation as 'a crime against France'.)

M. Laval remained at the Quai d'Orsay. After Doumergue's resignation he was offered the Premiership, but refused on the ground that there was quite enough to do at the Foreign Ministry; – which showed that he was determined to keep this post. He became, before long, the best-known French figure in international affairs – a notoriety which the much less picturesque M. Flandin rather envied him.

M. Flandin's Ministerial Declaration differed little from his speech at Arras a week earlier. The Doumergue proposals were shelved: 'If we become convinced that government stability cannot be restored within the framework of the present parliamentary institutions we shall not hesitate to have recourse to the procedure provided by the Constitution. But we shall count on Parliament to give us the necessary assistance in our work of national restoration.'

In other words, the 'journey to Versailles' was called off for the present.

There was also a reference to the Fascist Leagues and to the 'regrettable provocation' of which they had been guilty. Legislation regulating street demonstrations would soon be submitted to Parliament. *'L'état républicain ne capitulera pas devant les factions.'*

But the Declaration dwelt longest on the economic problems, and particularly on the necessity to revive the economic life of the country, to raise agricultural prices and to lower interest rates. The newly-formed Economic Council would be presided over by the Premier himself. A Premier's office would also be set up at the Hotel Matignon to co-ordinate the work of the various Government Departments. It was the only tangible survival of M. Doumergue's 'First Minister' proposal.

The Flandin Government was received almost joyfully by the Chamber, which granted it an overwhelming vote of confidence. The Doumergue nightmare was over; and the Flandin Government marked a return to normal democratic conditions. As if to prove to M. Doumergue that Parliament was capable of doing good work even without his reforms, the Chamber voted the 1935 Budget in record time, and in the process agreed to abolish the individual deputy's right to propose expenditure.

The first measures to be tabled by the Flandin Government were of an economic order and tended towards the *assainissement* of the wheat and wine markets. Two milliard francs were placed at the government's disposal to buy up the excess stocks; and the legal 'minimum price' of wheat, which had been consistently ignored by the grain trade, was abolished.

In a speech on November 28, M. Flandin indicated the principal feature of his financial policy: neither deflation nor devaluation. 'Deflation in France,' he said, 'is practically at an end. Fortunately, world prices, in terms of gold, are definitely rising. There is, therefore, no reason to inflict new sufferings on the country, which would lead to a grave social and political crisis; for the time has come when world prices are tending to catch up with French prices. I reject any financial and economic policy that would tend to pauperise the labouring classes of France.' By abolishing the minimum price of wheat, M. Flandin said, the government would reduce the price of bread by four sous a kilo – 'it is our Christmas present to the children of the poor'.

But a great deal of adjustment in industrial production was also necessary, and such adjustment – including lower costs – would be difficult unless interest rates came down. He there-

fore advocated a revival of trade by means of cheaper money. This proved a stumbling block. On January 1, M. Flandin replaced M. Moret, the orthodox Governor of the Bank of France by M. Tannery, who was believed to favour a more liberal credit policy, and who, it was hoped, would replace the 'defensive' credit policy of the Bank by a more 'active' policy, so as to remedy the economic crisis.

Unfortunately, M. Flandin was soon to be disappointed. In connection with the appointment of the new Governor the *Temps* immediately warned M. Flandin against 'financial laxity' which, it said, might lead to 'disguised inflation'; and before long, M. Tannery became an obedient tool, not in the hands of the government, but of the Regency Council of the Bank. The latent conflict between M. Flandin and the Bank of France broke out a few months later; and his policy of cheap money was defeated. We shall see later how Flandin came to grief.

After their failure to 'seize power' on the day of Doumergue's resignation, the Croix de Feu lay very low for a long time. They knew that they could expect no sympathy, still less encouragement, from the new government, and for several months they were not in evidence at all, except on February 6, when they and the other Fascist organisations commemorated the anniversary of the riots by laying flowers individually round the fountain on the south end of the Concorde – the place where the fighting had been heaviest. A memorial service for the victims of the 6th of February was also held at Notre Dame, and M. Flandin attended it, but only to be spat upon by a Royalist and to be called an *ignoble individu.* He discovered that such 'fairness' on the part of the Premier did not always pay.

It is true that the membership of the Croix de Feu continued to increase, and that their organisation, aided by generous donations from financial and industrial magnates, was improving; but the old fervour was gone. The extremists in the movement could not forgive La Rocque the 'opportunity' he had missed, and were becoming restive. In April, there was a first notable example of 'direct action' when a number of them raided the Socialist headquarters in the rue Feydeau in Paris; several of the men were arrested on the spot; and

Colonel de la Rocque condemned and denounced them. His 'uncomradelike' attitude on that occasion increased the discontent among the Fascist extremists in the movement; and it is about that time that several prominent Croix de Feu men, (who had favoured a *putsch* on the day of Doumergue's resignation) resigned in disgust. But the Croix de Feu were not played out yet – as they were to show under the much more sympathetic régime of M. Laval from June onward.

Internationally, Laval had become the dominant figure in French politics long before the formation of his own Cabinet in June 1935. He had succeeded M. Barthou after the Marseilles assassinations at the Quai d'Orsay; and, by refusing the Premiership after Doumergue's resignation, he had clearly shown his determination to remain master of France's foreign policy. The automatic pistol of the Croat terrorist killed not only King Alexander of Jugoslavia, but also M. Barthou, and with him, a definite French foreign policy.

The policy of Barthou, during his eight months in office, was to build up a vast defensive alliance against Germany who, in his opinion, was obviously and inevitably preparing for war. To keep up League appearances, he left the pacts open for Germany to join; but since she had no desire to join them he was quite prepared to do without her; and if his system amounted in practice to an encirclement of Germany, it would be, he said, her own fault. He distrusted Hitler totally and completely; and therefore refused, on April 17, to enter into any negotiations with Germany for a limitation agreement. He thought that, whatever she signed, she would not keep her promises. Only a vast anti-German coalition could keep Germany quiet. He brought Russia into the League, and laid the foundations for the Franco-Soviet Pact; he prepared the plans for an Eastern Mutual Assistance Pact, and also hoped, by reconciling Italy and Jugoslavia to 'organise security' in the Mediterranean and in Central Europe, and to settle in a permanent and satisfactory manner the problem of Austrian Independence.

His visits to the Little Entente capitals in May 1934 were a triumph: for the Czechs, Rumanians and Jugoslavs felt that the foreign policy of France had at last fallen into the strong hands of a man who knew his own mind, and who was not

prepared to abandon Eastern Europe to German penetration. But Poland proved the stumbling-block. Beck and Pilsudski, who both received him rather coldly, resented his *rapprochement* with Russia, and would not enter the Eastern Pact unless Germany came in too, (for which there was no hope). Nor was England very friendly to Barthou. His Note of April 17 caused much annoyance, and his 'policy of encirclement' was denounced as dangerous and shortsighted – though, in principle the British Government finally approved of the Eastern Pact. As for the Mediterranean, the conversations were cut short by the assassin's bullet. The encouragement Ante Pavelich and the other Croat terrorists had received from Italy infuriated Jugoslav opinion, and – for a time at least – it was no good resuming Barthou's attempts to 'reconcile' the two nations – a reconciliation to which he had attached the greatest importance.

Such was the situation when Laval took over at the Quai d'Orsay: apart from Russia's entry into the League, and the 'consolidation' of the Little Entente alliances, all Barthou's plans were still 'in the air'.

For a few weeks Laval kept us guessing: would he, or would he not continue Barthou's policy? What was known of his past record as Foreign Minister suggested that there would be *some* difference; but how great would it be?

The short meeting I had with Laval towards the end of November was something of a revelation. The Russians, the Little Entente and others, who had placed their faith in Barthou's policy were getting worried. Rumours were current of direct conversations that Laval was hoping to start with Germany; and the probable visit to Paris of Von Ribbentrop was widely spoken of. Laval, wearing the usual white tie, sat at his desk in his study at the Quai d'Orsay, whose luxuriously gilded furniture contrasted strangely with the Minister's plebeian appearance. An envelope with a German stamp lying in front of him, and addressed briefly to 'Aussenminister Laval, Paris' caught my eye. I referred to the worries of the Russians and the Little Entente and to the rumours about Von Ribbentrop. Laval stood up. 'Look at this,' he said, walking across the room and pointing to a map of Europe on the opposite wall. 'Do you see this big red patch right in the

middle of Europe?' he said, pointing to Germany. 'Do you *really* imagine that we can have peace and collective security in Europe so long as we haven't brought *this* into our peace system?'

It was a flash that lit up everything, showing in one second the difference between Barthou's policy and the policy that Laval intended to pursue. 'And as for the Russian complaint that I intend to have direct talks with Germany,' he added, with a touch of irritation, 'I think the less the Russians say about it, the better. Have *they* not had "direct conversations" with Germany for years?' – a reference to the Rapallo system. The Mongol eyes smiled slyly. He then turned to other matters. 'What party does the *Manchester Guardian* belong to?' he said. 'It doesn't belong to any party,' I replied, 'but it is a Liberal paper.' 'I see. So it's Lloyd George's paper.' 'No,' I said, 'it is not Lloyd George's paper.' 'And what's the name of the Socialist paper in England?' I said it was the *Daily Herald. 'Et le – comment appelez-vous ça? – le New Chronicle* – what is it? Is it Socialist?'

Many stories – some of them more apocryphal than this – are told about Laval's ignorance. There is the famous story of how, after seeing the Pope in Rome in January 1935, he called together the French journalists and said to them bitterly with an amusing Auvergnat drawl: *'Avec votre malveillance coutumière vous avez dit que j'aurais appelé le Pape "Monsieur le Pape" comme si je ne savais pas qu'il fallait dire: "Saint-Siège".'*[1]

And there is the less amusing, but more probable story of how, after his Rome conversations, François Mauriac – who happened to be in Rome at this time – pointed out to him that Abyssinia was a member of the League of Nations. 'Good God, is she really?' Laval exclaimed, much perturbed.

Laval is a 'man of the people' and is proud of it; – not that this protects him against certain *parvenu* ambitions – such as the ambition to marry his daughter into an aristocratic family. He is also secretly proud of being a Papal Count; Mussolini who arranged it beforehand with the Vatican, must have been aware of Laval's weakness for titles.

[1] With your usual bad faith you reported me as having addressed the Pope as 'Mr. Pope' as if I did not know that one had to call him 'Holy See'.

He was born at Chateldon, a small town in Auvergne, where his father kept a café and a butcher's shop, and was also in charge of taking mail-bags to the station. Little Pierre – as we have been told *ad nauseam* by his biographers – was entrusted at an early age with this responsible task. (Why the picture of a boy driving a horse and cart should provide visions of future greatness I have never quite understood.) The biographers further suggest that young Pierre was not satisfied with the plebeian career his father had mapped out for him, and insisted on being sent first to a secondary school, and later to the Faculty of Law in Paris. For a time he was *pion* (supervisor) at a school at Lyons, where he served under Herriot who was *professeur agrégé*. Later he returned to Paris, where he became a 'poor man's' lawyer, and soon afterwards legal adviser to the C.G.T. The Socialist party – of which he had become a member – held him in high esteem. On May 8, 1914 the *Humanité* wrote:

> In a few months he acquired an enviable position, and soon became the leading barrister of the principal workers' organisations. His name will remain associated with all the workers' suits of the last few years: he has pleaded successfully for teachers, and seamen, and postmen and soldiers, etc. In short, he is a young man come straight from the people, and as a *militant* he has done his duty valiantly, and has placed at the disposal of the Socialist Party his indefatigable energy and his pungent and convincing eloquence. His profound knowledge of labour problems, and his fine gifts as a speaker promise to render even greater services to the Party when he becomes a Deputy.

In May 1914 after an election campaign, in the course of which he thundered against 'Capitalism, the cause of all sufferings and all iniquity', and against the 'folly of armaments', and promised to 'liberate Labour of all oppression and exploitation', he was elected deputy for the Paris suburb of Aubervilliers by 10,182 votes to 8,586 cast for Marcel Habert, the reactionary candidate. He styled himself 'Revolutionary Socialist' and in the 1914 Chamber he was the youngest Socialist member. When the War broke out, he was one of the two deputies whose names were inscribed in the famous Carnet B. – the list of dangerous revolutionaries to be closely watched by the police. He did not serve in the War. In a

particularly sickly biography of Laval, Mlle Odette Pannetier describes his distress at being turned down, for reasons of bad health, by the *conseil de révision*; (though the same book contains in another connection, a rapturous description of his perfect health and marvellous endurance). Actually one may doubt whether he had any great desire to go to the front. During the second half of the War he belonged to the minority of the Socialist Party in favour of peace negotiations with Germany through the Second International. 'Stockholm' [where the proposed meeting with the German Social Democrats was to take place] he exclaimed at the end of a pacifist speech at the secret meeting of the Chamber on June 2, 1917, shortly after the disastrous Nivelle Offensive – 'Stockholm is our Polar Star!' He also spoke at length of the mutinies in the French Army, and was, in short, thoroughly 'defeatist'.

Towards the end of the War he began to evolve towards the Right. 'Democracy,' he said in a speech in 1919, 'will never fraternise with the Bolshevists.' He was defeated in the 1919 election, but re-elected in 1924 as a moderate Left-Wing independent on the *Cartel des Gauches* list. His subsequent career is well known. After holding a number of posts in Left Governments in 1925, he became Minister of Labour in Poincaré's National Government of 1926, and in 1930, having been, by this time, elected to the Senate, he joined Tardieu's Cabinet, also as Minister of Labour. It fell to his lot to elaborate the new Social Insurance system – a task which almost gave him the appearance of being a 'Left' Minister in an otherwise reactionary cabinet. Then, in 1931, he became Premier. He was much less disliked by the Left than Tardieu. He called himself an Independent, claimed to stand 'above party', and it is certainly true that then, and even much later, he still had innumerable personal friends on the Left; and even among the Communists. For it was Laval's first principle throughout his political career never to burn his bridges.

Laval is an Auvergnat, and like many Auvergnats he is dark-skinned and negroid – though the slant of his eyes is mongol rather than negroid. He is an unusual anthropological specimen, whom even Hitler, with his rough-and-ready ideas about *die vernegerten und verjudeten Franzosen* would find hard to classify. With his sallow skin, his thick but short lips, scarcely

covering what looks like an excessive number of irregular and dirty teeth, and his thick boyish head of smooth black hair (only beginning to turn grey), and his dark impenetrable Mongol eyes, he is unimpressive at first sight. A superficial observer once described him as looking like 'a seedy waiter'. But his physique is not without good points: he has a finely shaped, narrow nose, and his hands are small and expressive, – so unlike the big paws of Herriot.

Although he is a rich man (and his enemies will tell you that he is worth 40 or 50 or 60 million francs) he takes, like Briand, little notice of his clothes, and even his famous white tie, is not always perfectly tied – nor always perfectly white.

Apropos of this tie there is a story about a girl friend of José's, who, in a moment of cattiness, remarked: 'I wish your father would wear a black tie – and white teeth.'

No, Pierre Laval is not impressive at first sight; and yet he has a personality which grows on you. He has an engaging smile and a charming voice which makes even newcomers perfectly comfortable; and even at the height of his power he never abandoned his old habits of *camaraderie* and tutoyage, – a survival of his Socialist days.

'C'est un malin,' people would say about him; and he was proud of being *malin*. He never pretended to be a dreamer; nor could he ever be accused of being a doctrinaire. I remember the following dialogue in the Chamber Lobby one day:

A. (indignantly): Laval has never even read the Treaty of Versailles!

B. (with sublime irony): *C'est sa force!*

Many a true word is spoken in jest.

Laval's most immediate worry at the end of 1934 was the Saar plebiscite. Hitler had said that, once the Saar problem was settled, all territorial differences between France and Germany would be at an end. Barthou was prepared to use the Saar plebiscite as a means of inflicting at least a moral defeat on Germany. He wished the status quo vote to be as large as possible, and he gave the status quo leaders financial support. Laval, on the contrary, was desperately anxious to see the Saar problem cleared out of the way: he hoped that, after that, an agreement with Germany would become easier.

Barthou was fully prepared, if it was found necessary, to send French troops into the Saar to police the plebiscite. Laval shuddered at the thought of sending French troops into what he considered in advance to be German territory; for he felt that this would have a disastrous psychological effect in Germany, and would spoil the chances of any future agreement. If it came to the worst – that is, if no international police force could be found to go to the Saar – he was prepared to send some French police (preferably some German-speaking police from Alsace) to do the work; but certainly not French troops.

He was overjoyed when, at the Council Meeting at Geneva early in December, Mr. Eden agreed – in spite of all the previous opposition from Mr. Baldwin and the Beaverbrook and Rothermere Press – to send British troops into the Saar, and when Italy, Holland and Sweden agreed to send contingents as well. M. Laval had stated from the outset that if only an international force could be sent France would agree not to be represented among these contingents, provided Germany agreed to take the same attitude. It is doubtful whether M. Barthou would have made such a proposal. The strength of the contingents was subsequently fixed as follows:

Great Britain	1,500
Italy	1,300
Holland	250
Sweden	250

and Major-General Brind was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the international force.

In the meantime Herr von Ribbentrop, Herr Abetz and other official and semi-official representatives of the German Government were coming to, or staying in, Paris, and Laval had serious hopes that great progress would be made towards a Franco-German *rapprochement* once the Saar plebiscite was over.

Jean Goy, representing the reactionary ex-servicemen, went to Berlin and was well received by Hitler; and before a sceptical Chamber M. Montagnon, the Neo-Socialist Deputy, paid a tribute to the Hitler movement, which, he said, was being misunderstood and underrated in France. Young

men like Bertrand de Jouvenel and Stanislas de la Rochefoucauld, fascinated by Hitlerite 'dynamics', and believing more in the virtues of a Franco-German alliance than in the League, acted as go-betweens between the German official and semi-official emissaries and M. Laval. Whether M. Laval himself was – at that time – already prepared to talk to Germany in terms other than Geneva terms is uncertain; but, in any case, he was beginning to believe that he was 'the only man who could save France from war'. The first attempts made in French Fascist quarters to arrive at a Franco-German entente *outside* the League, date back to those days. They found Laval not altogether unsympathetic.

The Saar plebiscite was fixed for January 13.

CHAPTER VII

THE SAAR INTERLUDE

THE attention of the whole world was focused on the Saar during that first half of January. Three hundred journalists from every corner of the globe – everything from the star turns of French, British and American journalism to the obscure reporters of French provincial papers and 'special correspondents' of unknown Greek and Esthonian journals – were assembled in Saarbrücken. Many of them knew not a word of German. I left Paris for Saarbrücken on Tuesday, January 8 – five days before the plebiscite. My fellow-traveller was a French reporter, a shy little man representing a paper in Algeria, who had never been to Germany before, but had heard a lot about the brown terror, and who was growing more and more homesick for the palm-trees of Oran as the train, after passing Metz, was approaching its destination. He was pleasantly surprised when, at Saarbrücken station, nobody seemed to take the slightest notice of him.

Everybody who 'attended' the Saar plebiscite knows the Hotel Excelsior. It was the great meeting-place of all the foreign journalists, many of whom lived there. Two months later the Führer himself was to stay at the Excelsior, and speak from the balcony. The waiters were all German police spies; and the head porter had, for all his suave and obliging manners, the air of a hired assassin.

The big adjoining café, a babel of tongues, was crowded that afternoon. Many familiar faces were among them. It was regarded as the café of foreigners, Socialists and Jews; the German café was across the street. There were two great subjects of discussion that afternoon – the two great demonstrations at Saarbrücken on the previous Sunday, one Nazi and the other anti-Nazi; and – women. Some said that the status quo demonstration was 150,000 strong; others said it was 'barely 30,000'. Others again claimed (at least the Nazis had told them so)

that if there were 50,000 people at the status quo demonstration, 40,000 of them were French Communists who had come specially from Lorraine. As for the Nazi demonstration, the estimates varied from 30,000 to 300,000. It was all very bewildering for a newcomer.

As for the German women, it was the French journalists who complained most. The German women were too scared even to talk to them. *'Et il n'y a même pas de poules! C'est inouï!'* A young American journalist claimed to have been much luckier with 'a miner's daughter'. But she had begun the acquaintance by ascertaining whether he was really a Christian. In short, five days before the plebiscite the journalists had still plenty of spare time. They sat about drinking beer most of the time. Young Stanislas de la Rochefoucauld would bellow at the waiter: 'Ober! Bier!' digging a peremptory forefinger into the table in front of him. 'You do treat the Boches like a lot of bloody niggers,' I remarked. 'Of course I do,' he laughed. 'I want them to be sick of the sight of foreigners, and to be *sure* to vote against the status quo.'

In Saarbrücken itself that night there was nothing to suggest that anything unusual was going on in the Saar. The streets round the station had the appearance common to all middle-sized German towns, except for the absence of flags, whose display had been prohibited by the Governing Commission some time before. But the shop-windows made up for the absence of flags. They were crowded with portraits, postcards and bronze busts of the Nazi leaders. Particularly numerous were the pictures of Hitler, who was shown in almost every conceivable costume and attitude – patting a little girl ('Ein kleiner Besuch in Berchtesgaden'), feeding a goat ('Der Führer als Tierfreund') and so on. The window of a music-shop was filled with gramophone records of 'Deutsch ist die Saar' encircled with fir-tree garlands, and with a picture of Hitler in the centre.

Except for a Marxist bookshop with a large portrait of Lenin, and a French bookshop – 'the only carrier of French civilisation in the Saar', as a Frenchman whom I met there wistfully remarked – all the others displayed Nazi propaganda literature – '*Mein Kampf*' and Rosenberg's *Mythus* and a biography of Goering's first wife (his second one had not yet appeared

on the scene), and books on the *Fremdenherrschaft* in the Saar, and an economic treatise by Röchling, the Saar steel magnate, and what not. All this Nazi propaganda had no status quo counterpart. Only Nazi papers were displayed on the bookstalls and individual vendors of the *Volksstimme* and other status quo papers were being intimidated. In short, the vast majority of shopkeepers – whatever their political opinions – were making sure of being on the right side, and were displaying their 'reliability' as hard as they could.

The Municipal Theatre was going to celebrate the plebiscite on the following Sunday with Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, which had been registered in Germany as a Nazi play.

The foreign troops were not in evidence, and might have been completely absent, but for a few British soldiers here and there at night. The status quo people thought that this reserve was overdone, while the German Front people disliked the very thought of these troops. One of them thought the canes carried by the British soldiers had an insulting look. 'We had rather,' he said, 'they carried rifles.'

I found three East Lancashire men in the Nazi café that night. They all thought it great fun being abroad, but one of them was beginning to feel 'a bit bored', as there was nothing to do except the usual routine work from early morning till 5 p.m. The Germans they had met were 'all right'; and they were satisfied with the food, but less with their quarters in Saarbrücken – a large workmen's tenement on the outskirts. There were five hundred men in the building, and eight men in one small room. The 'blooming radiators' made the rooms stuffy, especially when all eight men smoked at once. And yet one could not open the window for the smoke and stench of the factory just outside.

The next day I went to the headquarters of the Deutsche Front, and asked for Herr Pirro – the Nazi Saar leader. But Herr Pirro was not available. He was said to be ill; but rumours were current that he had been deposed, or even poisoned. I don't know to this day what happened to him; but he certainly was not poisoned. I was received by a young man – rather *méfiant*, but perfectly courteous – who declared that the Deutsche Front were perfectly sure of their victory. 'Even if I say that we'll get ninety per cent and we then get

eighty-nine per cent you *Herren der Auslandspresse* will call it a Nazi defeat. The Saar people will vote with their blood; and they don't care a hang whether their return to Germany will be economically profitable or unprofitable for them. And don't keep worrying about what we are going to do to the status quo people after the plebiscite. The leaders will have run away, and the rank and file will repent.'

That evening the *Herren der Auslandspresse* who had to be converted, for many of them still talked of a forty per cent status quo vote, were taken by the Deutsche Front in motor-buses to Kaiserslautern, in Bavaria, to attend the great Nazi *Kundgebung* presided over by Herr Bürckel, the High Commissioner for the Saar. We drove for two hours through the dark. We passed a French *douanier* at the Saar frontier (the customs union between France and the Saar was still in force, and the grocers' shops at Saarbrücken were full of good Roquefort and Camembert; but German blood, as my Nazi had foretold that morning, proved stronger than any economic or gastronomic advantages). There was something moving about that solitary little French *douanier* – he was like the last survivor of Hoche's revolutionary army that took to Germany – which never learned to appreciate it – the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Wearing his blue kepi, he looked on wearily as the heavy *autocars* of the Deutsche Front rolled past him into the Third Reich. He wouldn't be there much longer; and it was no use bothering.

Kaiserslautern was Wagnerian. Three giant beacons were burning in front of the Town Hall, and immense Swastika flags were suspended from the roof. We were late. The meeting had already begun, and Herr Bürckel, Gauleiter for the Palatinate, in his S.A. uniform was haranguing the crowd. The whole back of the platform was an immense green tapestry made of fir branches, which filled the hall with the smell of primeval forests, and the red Swastika flags against the green background made a pleasing, if barbarous, colour effect. The middle of the platform was decorated with a vast white wooden Swastika. To the right of the platform sat the S.A. band. The *Herren der Auslandspresse* were conducted into seats by courteous S.A. men. The audience was a mixed one with many S.S. men among them, and a high proportion of women.

There was an old toothless man, looking like an old-fashioned shoemaker, who laughed very heartily at all Herr Bürckel's jokes. I also noticed in the audience a red-haired fox-faced German – a dirty piece of work, whom I had already noticed nosing about at the Hotel Excelsior. He was there to keep an eye on us.

Herr Bürckel was a burly man, looking and sounding rather like Goering. He denounced the status quo people as separatists and traitors and agents of France; and at every mention of France the audience cried 'pfui!' (Poor Laval, I thought, with his illusions of a Franco-German entente!) The status quo people would not be mishandled after the plebiscite – Herr Bürckel said. Oh no! They would be taken into Germany and *educated*. There were too many hostile foreign observers in the Saar. (It all sounded rather sinister.) And then there was more about German blood, and the German soul. And at the decisive moment (Herr Bürckel said), many a German man and many a German woman, who were now allowing themselves to be deluded by the separatists, would remember their father or their mother, and their father or their mother would take them by the hand, and lead them back to the Fatherland. The speech was an astute mixture of intimidation and German sentimentality; and when it was over the S.A. band played and the audience sang with outstretched arms the *Horst Wessel Lied* and *Deutschland Über Alles* and *Deutsch ist die Saar, Deutsch immerdar*. And outside, the crowds Heil-Hitlered, and the beacons cast a Wagnerian *Feuerzauber* over it all. Later, after the meeting, Herr Bürckel joined the *Herren der Auslandspresse* in the Bierhalle, where beer and sausages were served, and did a little more 'rubbing-in'. What seemed to worry him above all was the suggestion – a suggestion that he attributed angrily to Litvinoff – that the Saar might be split by the League Council into two in the event of a large status quo vote. Every inch of the Saar, he said, must return to Germany. 'You must realise this, *meine Herren*; there will never be real peace between France and Germany until this has happened.' But he did not pay for our beer and sausages. A number of English journalists had got by mistake into the back seat of a motor-coach otherwise reserved for German journalists. As we drove

back to Saarbrücken the Germans in front sang their patriotic and folk songs. We also joined in and sang 'O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum', finishing up rather *diminuendo*: 'We'll keep the red flag flying high.' Herr Bürckel made you feel that way.

Au fond, everybody expected the Saar to go back to Germany; but the case of the status quo people was a deserving one; the poor devils were, after all, the last Mohicans of a free Germany; and they had the whole vast propaganda machinery of the Third Reich against them. Politically, a plain return of the Saar to Germany was the most expedient thing, and the setting up of a small status quo state – a sort of Whipsnade for Saar Socialists and Communists – seemed sound enough on humanitarian grounds, but scarcely otherwise. Only the vulgar opulence of the Deutsche Front, and the terrorist methods to which it resorted, especially during the three days before the plebiscite, deserved to be shown up. The mistake that some journalists made was to allow their wish to be father to their thought, and to prophesy almost to the last moment a large status quo poll – for which there was not the slightest chance.

The status quo people comprised the Socialists, led by Max Braun, a man of great personal courage, who would walk unperturbed through a hostile Nazi crowd; the Communists, led by Fritz Pfordt, and a small section of Catholics, led by a man called Hoffmann. At one time there had been some doubt about the Catholic vote; but a few weeks before the plebiscite the Archbishop of Treves (following, no doubt, an agreement between Hitler and the Vatican) had clearly declared himself in favour of the Saar's return to Germany; and that seemed to settle it. Nevertheless, even at the beginning of January the status quo people were not yet disheartened. The Saar, a vast conglomeration of coal mines and iron foundries, and with a population estimated to be at least thirty per cent Socialist and Communist, seemed to contain at least a high proportion of people who would do anything rather than vote 'for Hitler'. Nobody – not even the most anti-Hitler among the foreign journalists – seriously believed that the status quo vote would be over fifty per cent; but if it was thirty or forty per cent, it would be a moral blow to Hitler, and the League Council (which was bound to 'take

account of the wishes of the inhabitants') might decide to split the Saar into two parts – one, to return to Germany, and the other to remain an independent state under League authority. Herr Bürckel, as we have seen, was seriously alarmed by the prospect; and even declared that if Germany did not get the *whole* Saar, she would refuse it altogether.

The League Council had also decided that in case of a status quo majority, the Saarlanders would, after a certain time, be allowed to hold another plebiscite. This meant in effect that, by voting for the status quo, they would not detach themselves permanently from Germany; but would only keep away so long as Germany was under Hitler. The Nazis, naturally, disliked this proposal as much as the 'partition' proposal; and branded it a 'Beneš–Litvinov swindle'. The status quo leaders felt that, with a thirty per cent poll, and especially if certain communes had an absolute status quo majority, they might conveniently raise the question of a partition.

Until three or four days before the plebiscite they did not consider thirty per cent impossible. Their demonstration at Saarbrücken on Sunday, January 6, had been impressive; the leaders claimed 150,000 people – which was about double the true figure; but even 75,000 was pretty good. An illustrated paper called *Status Quo* published photographs of the demonstration describing it as: 'Die Sieger des 13ten Januar.'

'We shall return to Germany,' the 'solemn oath' said, 'when Hitler's domination has been smashed; we shall return to a free Germany.' And there was a comic poem illustrated by the picture of a dismal looking pair – Hitler and Goebbels:

> 'Wie is der Adolf so betrübt,
> Weil's so viel Status-quo-ler gibt!
> Und auch der Joseph scheint nicht froh
> Ihm ward zu gross der Status quo. . . .
> Und Adolf spricht gedankentief:
> Ich fürchte an der Saar geht's schief.'

And the *Volksstimme*, the Socialist paper of Saarbrücken, kept on saying in its headlines:

'SONNTAG SCHLAGEN WIR HITLER'

But as the plebiscite approached, the optimism declined. For one thing, the status quo leaders had no money. Their propa-

ganda literature did not reach a wide public; partly because there was not enough of it, and partly because bookstalls did not display it, and individual vendors were being intimidated by the Ordnungsdienst, the unofficial Nazi militia; whose presence became very obvious in the streets of Saarbrücken four days before the plebiscite. The status quo posters, whenever they were put up (and they were not put up in many places), were torn down or disfigured. Their famous poster (famous for being reproduced by many foreign papers) depicting a bloodstained Goering with a hatchet and the figure of Christ with his hand raised in admonition, beside him, and with the single word 'Choose' below, was not to be seen anywhere in the Saar.

The Deutsche Front also terrorised individual 'suspects'. Every house had its *Blockwarte*, a sort of Nazi propaganda and terrorist agent, who kept a watchful eye on all the tenants – who knew that their good or bad conduct was being duly registered somewhere. There were also cruder means of intimidation. At Neunkirchen, believed to be a status quo stronghold, the rumour was started that arrangements had already been made for transforming a certain building of the town into a concentration camp after March 1. It had a very depressing effect on the local inhabitants. I also remember going to see a trade union official in a small mining town near Saarbrücken. The man was in terror: he had just received an anonymous circular: 'You status quo swine will soon know what a concentration camp looks like.' It was the third message of the kind he had received in a week. 'And yet,' he added, 'they may as well put me in a concentration camp. What's the good of starving abroad?'

Another small detail; the taxi-driver who had taken me to the town, refused to stop his car outside the trade union building, but drove two hundred yards up the road, and made me walk back. 'I don't want to be mixed up in anything like *that*,' he mumbled.

By Friday, January 11, Saarbrücken was already a Nazi town. During a large part of the day trains continued to arrive from Germany bringing to the Saar the Germans entitled to vote in the plebiscite. To avoid street disturbances the police were ordered by the governing commission to

cordon off during a considerable part of the day the square outside the station. An exception was however made for the Ordnungsdienst of the German Front, who were allowed inside the station, and who automatically monopolised, as it were, all the voters coming from Germany. These were conducted amid loud cheering and heil-hitlering to the Nazi headquarters in a large café near the station. The voters did not stay at hotels but were lodged in private houses, the accommodation (and, in most cases the food) being provided free of charge. The German Front had a register of 'voluntary' offers to put up the voters from Germany. About 14,000 voters from Germany arrived on January 11 at Saarbrücken, and many more in other parts of the Saar. The total numbers of voters from Germany was 45,000 and the German Front treated them as their property. They must have felt grateful for all the care they were receiving. A great fuss was made outside the station about voters who had come from America. I remember particularly a young woman with a large bunch of flowers and her 'little cousin Rudi from Buenos Aires' who talked to the German Front officials about their marvellous journey; and about the reception they had been given at Hamburg – which was simply *fabelhaft*. And as they escorted her to the Nazi headquarters she blew kisses and made Hitler salutes to the cheering crowds on either side of the street.

That evening already there was rather an ugly atmosphere in the streets of Saarbrücken. They were swarming with pugnacious-looking people exchanging Hitler salutes, and including an unusually large number of persons wearing clothes hardly differing from the Brownshirt uniform, except for the absence of the Swastika armlet. In several of the cafés crowds sat round the brass bands bawling Nazi songs. The prohibition of strong drink which came into force that day had failed to have a sobering effect upon the political passions. The newspaper kiosks were displaying nothing but Nazi papers, including a huge special 96-page issue of the *Deutsche Front*, to be distributed free of charge.

Although the existence of the Blockwarte had until then been denied by the German Front, he now figured officially in the new instructions published by the German Front among the persons to be entrusted with the observance of discipline.

The intimidation was carried on even in schools, where a teacher I heard of that day had asked one of the boys whether his parents had 'booked a room in France after the plebiscite'.

Saarbrücken was swarming with spies, as one could easily observe, for instance, from the ill-concealed interest of waiters and hotel porters in the private conversations of their customers.

It was becoming increasingly clear that the presence of foreign troops in the Saar territory might restrain violence, but that it had little or no effect in restricting individual violence and intimidation. It could assure a secret vote but not guarantee a free plebiscite. A statement was issued by the General Staff that during the plebiscite the troops would not be stationed outside the polling booths, but would be merely –

> Disposed in suitable positions so that they can be readily available should a situation arise in any part of the Territory with which the police cannot deal. Except for escorting duty the troops have nothing to do with the running of the plebiscite which is in the hands of the Governing Commission.

The Governing Commission had to depend on the Saar police, who afraid of losing their jobs after the plebiscite, were naturally all on the side of the German Front. The international police force was very small and of very little importance.

It was all very discouraging to the status quo leaders. The friends of Max Braun used to meet at night in a small private boarding-house on the second floor of a house in one of the main streets of Saarbrücken. A frightened old woman would open the door hesitatingly when the bell rang. During those last two days before the plebiscite these meetings became gloomy and almost macabre. They were like the meetings of men who might be dead the next day. Max Braun for all his courage, looked ill and exhausted, and his mouth twitched. As they sat there, eating their simple supper and drinking cheap Pfalzwein, one wondered, as one looked through the open window, how it was that nobody had yet been tempted to fire a gun at them with impunity from across the street. But – as Herr Bürckel had said – there was still too much publicity in the Saar. It wouldn't have done.

. . . . . .

At last the great day came.

It had snowed all Saturday and the Saar territory was covered with several inches of snow when the polling station opened at eight o'clock on Sunday morning. As one motored through the towns and villages one was impressed by the cheerfulness of the picture. Even the dreariest mining village looked like an ideal Christmas card and every slag-heap like a miniature Jungfrau. In the villages and smaller towns the children were busy with their sleighs and their snowmen, some of them doing the Hitler salute. Everything reminded one of the ideal winter depicted in the picture-books used for generations by German children. This 'German' winter was bound to appeal to the sentimentality of the voters. Innumerable houses were decorated with fir-tree garlands.

In nearly all the towns and villages there were cheerful crowds in the main streets and round the polling booths, and a continuous coming and going of cars and buses in the service of the German Front carrying voters to and from the polling stations. Three or four hundred powerful brick-coloured buses with R.P. ('Reichspost') painted on them had been placed at the disposal of the German Front by the German Post Office. These buses clearly suggested that the Saar was *already* part of the *Reich,* and that the very word status quo – 'that cold foreign word' – was meaningless. The German Front also made use of many hundreds of private cars either labelled 'Motor Service' or flying the Red Cross flag, though most of the passengers in these ambulances looked hale and hearty people. In short, the German Front had attempted to 'handle' as many voters as possible by virtually monopolising all the transport to and from the polling stations.

The police, the auxiliary police (mostly composed of firemen) and the Ordnungsdienst (the semi-military force of the Deutsche Front) were obviously working hand-in-hand. It was a process of amalgamation that had its equivalent in Germany in February and March 1933. Nazis were on duty outside most of the polling booths.

In the smaller towns and villages – except in one or two 'strongholds' of the status quo – no status quo posters were to be seen anywhere. Only on one hoarding did we see a fairly full set of them, but even there they had been disfigured by Nazi leaflets pasted on top of them. Nazi posters, on the

other hand, were displayed even in shop-windows. We visited several polling stations throughout the Saar, and everything seemed to be passing off normally. The polling was handled by a foreign Chairman and by two representatives each of the German Front and the Freedom Front. The absence of a representative of the 'French' party showed that it was almost non-existent. (The only passionate believer in a 'French Saar' I met was the proprietor of a French restaurant in the cathedral square of Saarbrücken – what a relief those *entrecôtes* of his were after the *cuisine* of the Excelsior! He had served under Mangin, and fervently believed, until the last moment, that Mangin's Rhine policy was the only right one. After the plebiscite, when Saarbrücken became a sea of Swastika flags, he hung out defiantly the French tricolour outside his restaurant. It was not pulled down.) The voting itself, as organised by the League, was no doubt fair and secret. But pressure was exercised on the voter by the German Front until the very moment he entered the polling booth. At Homburg, for instance, a pugnacious-looking person stood outside the polling station and made a point of greeting every new arrival with the Hitler salute. Perhaps the presence of one or two British sentries would have had a more reassuring effect on the more timid voters.

But there were no troops in evidence anywhere. Only in Homburg, in a restaurant decorated with garlands and pictures of Hitler, did I come across a British sergeant and six men. They drank and played billiards and fooled about with the maids. Most of the troops were confined to their barracks, and did not come out until the voting was over, and the ballot-boxes had to be escorted to the Wartburg at Saarbrücken, where the votes were to be counted.

While the voting was still in progress, the Deutsche Front started the rumour that Max Braun and Fritz Pfordt, the Socialist and Communist leaders, had already fled to France. They denied this by driving through several of the mining towns and showing themselves to the people. The risks run by these men in the circumstances need not be emphasised.

That night at Saarbrücken the streets were illuminated in celebration of the expected German victory. There had been some minor disorders during the day and wherever the police

had intervened they had invariably taken action against the advocates of the status quo.

The first lorries with the ballot-boxes began to arrive at the Wartburg about 9 p.m. escorted by British soldiers with fixed bayonets. While the lorries were arriving a crowd of two or three thousand Nazis gathered outside singing and shouting and giving the Hitler salute. Shortly afterwards, a party of Communists singing the Internationale marched through the hostile crowds in the main streets of Saarbrücken. The courage of some of the rank and file almost bordered on fatalism.

The counting of votes began at 5 p.m. on Monday, January 14, at the Wartburg, a large public hall at Saarbrücken, built in the gaudy pre-War style of the Hohenzollerns. The building was heavily guarded by British troops. To convince any possible doubters that there would be no tampering with voting papers, the proceedings took place in public. Several hundred people had gathered in the galleries. The area downstairs was occupied by sixty or seventy tables with six representatives of the Plebiscite Commission at each.

After a brief speech by Mr. Rohde, the President of the Commission, who paid a tribute to the 'perfect order' in which the plebiscite had taken place, the counting began. There was a clatter of ballot-boxes being emptied on the tables, and the officials then proceeded to count and later to open the large stacks of blue envelopes. Everywhere one could see a big pile growing, with a tiny pile of papers next to it; and here and there a third 'pile' with one or two ballot-papers (these were the votes for France).

I met in the gallery a former Socialist Deputy of the Reichstag. 'It's just what I thought,' he said. 'Terror or no terror, the people couldn't get away from the fact that they had to vote "for or against Germany". Hitler was only a secondary consideration. "Let's get back to Germany first. We'll see about Hitler later." I am of peasant stock myself – and I know the feeling.'

The status quo people were, naturally, in despair. They declared that the plebiscite had taken place not only in conditions contrary to the provisions of the treaty, but also in flat contradiction with the Franco-German Agreement of June 1, 1934, in terms of which Germany had to 'abstain from

pressure of any kind, whether direct or indirect, likely to affect the freedom and trustworthiness of the voting'.

Early next morning the result of the plebiscite was announced at the Wartburg by the President of the Plebiscite Commission:

	Votes	Per cent
For Germany	477,119	90.08
For Status Quo	46,513	8.87
For France	2,124	0.44
Spoilt Papers	2,249	0.47
Total Poll ..	528,005	

The 'German Soul of the Saar' had won. The announcement of the figures was greeted with frantic cheers from the Germans in the Press gallery. Immediately the results were announced the church bells throughout Saarbrücken began to ring, and in less than half an hour the streets were a sea of flags. The fog which had hung over the town at dawn disappeared and the thousands of Swastika flags made a dazzling picture as the sun came out. Within a short time every motor-car was decorated with flags, and I even saw a horse with six flags protruding from its harness and its tail, and a dog with a Swastika flag round its neck. All the shops were closed, and the streets swarmed with cheerful crowds shouting 'Heil Hitler!' Cars with their occupants waving Nazi flags drove through the streets, and various youth organisations with their brass bands marched about amid general rejoicing.

I went that morning to the Communist headquarters and found Fritz Pfordt with fifteen or twenty comrades in one small room, waiting for whatever might happen next. Later in the day the premises were cleared by the police who declared that they 'could not answer for the safety of the Communists any longer'.

Max Braun held a Press reception in the morning. Outside, the church bells were ringing, and the flags were being hung out. The *Volksstimme* had come out that morning with the headline: 'Wir kämpfen weiter'; and Braun also said that they would 'carry on the struggle'. But how could they? He intended to go to Geneva and see that the League afforded adequate protection to 'its' minority. He would then come

back to Saarbrücken. His friends told him he had better stay abroad; for what was the good of a leader in a concentration camp?

In the meantime the Nazis were already selling black-edged cards in the street announcing the decease of Herr Status Quo, and signed by the mourning family 'Max Braun, Paris, Fritz Pfordt, Monte Carlo, and Hoffmann, Strassburg'.

Actually Hoffmann was already at Forbach. That morning I took a car, richly decorated, like all cars, with Nazi flags, to see what was happening on the other side of the frontier. The driver first refused to go to France on account of the flags; but finally agreed to take me to Forbach. Once we were outside Saarbrücken he decided that it might be better to take down the flags. Yet when we actually reached the frontier, he became fidgety and nervous and declared that he had left his passport at home by mistake. I had to get out and walk across the frontier. Looking back I saw my German driver stop fifty yards down the road and carefully put up his flags again.

I returned to Saarbrücken in the afternoon. The main streets were swarming with joyful crowds. British soldiers were carried shoulder high and cheered by the Nazis. Among the performances most appreciated by the crowds were the mock-funerals of Herr Status Quo. The coffin was followed by the mourners in top-hats chanting dismally: 'Status Quo, Status Quo, Status Quo is dead.'

Rather more sinister was the procession of a crowd of young thugs who paraded outside the Socialist and Communist headquarters, carrying a more or less symbolic hangman's rope. At night there was an interminable torchlight procession through the streets of Saarbrücken.

At the Hotel Excelsior people were packing up – the 'news value' of the Saar was over. In the bar, round a table with a Nazi flag stuck into an empty bottle, the fox-faced Gestapo agent and three red-faced women were gulping German champagne, shouting 'Sieg Heil' as they clicked their glasses.

During the weeks that followed – and while the Governing Commission was still nominally in charge – the terror was at its height. There was little beating and few people were injured. But a psychological terror of the worst kind was organised against former supporters of the status quo. The

Nazis carrying torches, would chant 'quack, quack' outside an unfortunate workman's window, and drive him and his wife and children into a state bordering on insanity. Dummies with ropes round their necks would be hung outside some doors. The special correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* (F. A. Voigt), who stayed on after the plebiscite told the following story: 'In a certain village a family of four were suspected of having voted for France. One evening the Nazis arrived with torches and sang "The Saar is free" and then went through the mummery of burying "Herr Status Quo", shouting, "Quack, quack, quack" all the time. Only it was a deep grave for four people which they dug in the garden, and they hinted darkly but plainly that they would return on March 1 and then certain things would happen – whereupon all would be buried in that grave. . . . Some of the worst terrorists in the Saar to-day are the children and the younger workmen. . . .

'The question "What are the troops here for?" [that some of the victims of the terror are asking] may be unreasonable, for it is obviously difficult for troops to deal with a situation of this kind. But the question is natural nevertheless. When the British officers return the Hitlerite salute, and when local Nazi leaders are welcome guests in the Officers' Mess, it is not surprising that simple folk in the Saarland should believe that England – and therefore the League and the powers – are on the side of Hitler.'[1]

But the League was helpless. After settling the question of the French mines it did nothing more about the Saar, and on March 1, the Saar was incorporated in the Reich.

Some 5,000 refugees – for whom the League had made no provision – had fled to France, and many of them are still in abject poverty. (Others have fought on the Government side – and been killed – in the Spanish Civil War.) The French were glad that there weren't more. On the whole, they – and especially M. Laval – were glad that the Saar had been cleared out of the way with the minimum of complications. For there could obviously be no question of 'partitioning' the Saar, with less than nine per cent of the votes cast for the status quo. *Tant mieux.*

. . . . . .

Manchester Guardian, January 22, 1935.

But Laval was soon to be disillusioned.[1] For no sooner was the Saar plebiscite over than the German Press became aggressively anti-French. Ribbentrop and other German emissaries who had been coming to Paris in December, had now vanished. The 'only territorial difference' (as Hitler called it) between France and Germany having been cleared out of the way, the German Press immediately proceeded to nurse Germany's other grievances. Two months later, on Saturday, March 16, Hitler solemnly tore up Part V of the Treaty of Versailles and reintroduced conscription in Germany. This opened a new phase in European relations.

[1] Soon after the plebiscite a friend remarked to Laval: 'And those illusions you had about Germany?' 'Illusions,' Laval replied curtly, 'that were attributed to me.'

CHAPTER VIII

BUILDING ON SAND

IT would scarcely be true to say that Laval was 'anti-League from the outset. It is even probable that he was anxious at first to pursue a League policy, and to achieve the maximum of 'collective security'. Barthou saw collective security in the encirclement of Germany, and even if he did not believe that such an encirclement was a guarantee against war, it was at least a guarantee against defeat. Laval's efforts, on the other hand, were directed, during his first phase at the Quai d'Orsay, towards bringing Germany into the 'peace system' – by persuading her to adhere to the regional pacts. Perhaps he did not believe that these pacts were a solid guarantee against war; but he thought that Germany's formal adherence to them might at least postpone war for a time. He also felt that countries like Germany and Italy had legitimate grievances, and he constantly tried to suggest that he would do his best to satisfy these grievances; in the meantime he tried to keep them happy with little concessions. He discouraged any opposition to Germany in the Saar plebiscite; and he made various – rather more important – concessions to Italy during the Rome conversations of January 5–8. But during the early part of 1935, Laval had not yet come to the conclusion that only a free hand for Germany in the East would save France from war. Had he lost all faith in the 'collective system', he would hardly have signed the Franco-Soviet Pact on May 2. Later, however, he did his best not to submit the Franco-Soviet Pact to the Chamber for ratification. 'Laval,' a Soviet diplomat observed, in commenting on his hesitations about the Soviet Pact, 'is a dustbin of conflicting desires.'

But although he was full of conflicting desires, he had certainly a strong predilection for coming to terms with the Great Powers, and friendship with Italy to him was infinitely more important than France's alliances with the Little Entente

countries which, to his rustic brain, were little more than a 'dust' of small countries with queer names.

Whether during his Rome talks he gave Mussolini a free hand in Abyssinia may be a matter of some speculation; though he himself denied it very emphatically in the course of the ratification debate at the Chamber on March 22. 'There was nothing,' he said, 'either in the Rome agreements or in the Rome conversations which could cause the slightest damage to the sovereignty, the independence or the territorial integrity of Abyssinia.'

But what probably happened was that Laval was so delighted with the cordiality of his talks with Mussolini that when the latter mentioned Abyssinia, Laval showed a notable lack of interest in the subject. It may be quite true, as the story goes, that he did not realise at the time that Abyssinia was a member of the League of Nations.

The Rome agreements provided for:

1. Mutual consultation between France and Italy in the event of any threat to Austrian independence, and a recommendation to Austria's neighbours to take part in such consultation.
2. The extension of the present nationality status of Italian settlers in Tunisia until 1960.
3. The transfer to Italy of territories in French Somaliland and south of Libya. (At that time – to use Mussolini's later phrase – he was still a 'collector of deserts' – for he did not wish to offend Laval by turning up his nose at his presents.)
4. The transfer to Italy of a small share in the control of the Jibuti-Addis-Ababa railway.
5. An agreement between France and Italy to consider Germany's rearmament illegal without a previous agreement on the subject between Germany and the Great Powers.

This final clause with its reference to the Great Powers, savoured of the Four-Power Pact, which Mussolini was perhaps still hoping to revive.

The French Press sang paeans of praise to Laval – 'the first French Foreign Minister who had visited Rome since the War' – for the Rome agreement which, it said, marked the final reconciliation between the 'two Latin sisters'. 'France and Italy,' Bertrand de Jouvenel was told by a high dignitary in

Rome, 'will henceforth be the centre of cultural radiance in Europe.'[1]

Laval was extremely pleased with himself. He sincerely believed that he had made not merely a friend, but an ally of Italy; and that even if Germany persisted in ignoring his advances, Italy's friendship, at any rate, could be relied upon.

The whole of France's foreign policy during 1935 was dominated by this widespread belief in the value of the Rome agreements and in the strength of Franco-Italian friendship. It was somehow taken for granted that, owing to Austria, and to Italy's natural reluctance to see 'the German flag flying on the Brenner' her friendship for France was sincere and – inevitable.

Mussolini's process of bamboozling Laval and a very important part of French opinion was, indeed, a masterpiece of machiavellian diplomacy. At Stresa he supported Laval's mutual assistance schemes, and joined in the 'Stresa Front' against Germany; and it was also at Stresa that the ground was prepared for the subsequent Gamelin–Badoglio agreement concerning the withdrawal of French and Italian troops from their common frontier.

He had France at his mercy: for with Italy as her friend and with all her troops available for the Rhine frontier, she felt secure as seldom before. Was she to throw away her own security for the sake of Abyssinia? The blackmailing of France had been prepared with exquisite refinement; – and without her even knowing that it was blackmail!

And even as late as May 1936, when Abyssinia was defeated and sanctions were about to be lifted, an important part of French opinion still hoped that Italy would now consent to return to the Stresa Front! Not until sanctions had been raised did Italy openly join forces with Germany – as she did in the case of the Spanish Civil War.

Such was Italy's attitude to France in the light of later developments.

But in 1935 a large part of French opinion sincerely believed in the happy future of Franco-Italian relations. On March 22, the Chamber ratified the Rome agreements unanimously, except for the nine Communist votes.

[1] *Le Petit Journal*, January 7 1935.

'In spite of everything, in spite of our hostility towards the Mussolini régime,' M. Blum wrote on the following day, 'we [the Socialists] voted for the ratification of the Rome agreements, because we believe this to be in the interests of peace. . . . We could not refuse to approve a diplomatic act which we should have carried out ourselves had we been in power.' M. Blum then declared himself satisfied with the assurance given by M. Laval that there was not a word of truth in the story that he had given Mussolini a free hand in Abyssinia.

Between the Rome agreement and its ratification another development took place, which, at the time, was considered as being of the utmost importance. It was the Anglo-French declaration of February 3, the outcome of M. Flandin's and M. Laval's visit to London. This new peace plan read as follows:

> The object of the meeting between the British and French Ministers which has been taking place in London was to promote the peace of the world by closer European co-operation in a spirit of most friendly confidence and to remove those tendencies which, if unchecked, are calculated to lead to a race in armaments and to increase the dangers of war.
>
> With this object in view the British and French Ministers proceeded to an examination of the general situation.
>
> *The League's Recent Successes:* They took note of the particularly important part played by the League of Nations in the recent settlements of certain international problems [The Hungarian-Jugoslav conflict and the Saar] and welcomed the successful results as evidence of the conciliatory spirit of all the governments taking part in those settlements. They declare their determination to pursue as regards both the problems of their own countries and of the League, policies guided by the same methods of conciliation and co-operation.
>
> *The Rome Agreement:* With reference to the Franco-Italian agreements recently reached in Rome, the British Ministers, on behalf of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, cordially welcomed the declaration by which the French and Italian Governments have asserted their intention to develop the traditional friendship which unites the two nations, and associated His Majesty's Government with the intention of the French and Italian Governments to collaborate in a spirit of mutual trust in the maintenance of general peace.
>
> *The Integrity of Austria:* The British Ministers expressed the congratulations of His Majesty's Government on the conclusion

of the Rome Agreement regarding Central Europe, and made clear that as a consequence of the declarations made by His Majesty's Government in conjunction with the French and Italian Governments on February 17 and September 27 last His Majesty's Government consider themselves to be among the Powers which will, as provided in the Rome Agreement, consult together if the independence and integrity of Austria are menaced.

Germany and a General Settlement: The British and French Ministers hope that the encouraging progress thus achieved may now be continued by means of the direct and effective co-operation of Germany.

They are agreed that neither Germany nor any other Power whose armaments have been defined by the peace treaties is entitled by unilateral action to modify these obligations. But they are further agreed that nothing would contribute more to the restoration of confidence and the prospects of peace among nations than a general settlement freely negotiated between Germany and the other Powers.

Eastern Pact: This general settlement would make provision for the organisation of security in Europe, particularly by means of the conclusion of pacts freely negotiated by all the interested parties, and ensuring mutual assistance in Eastern Europe and the system foreshadowed in the Rome *procès-verbal* for Central Europe.

Simultaneously and in conformity with the terms of the declaration of December 11, 1932, regarding equality of rights in a system of security this settlement would establish agreements regarding armaments generally which, in the case of Germany, would replace the provisions of Part Five of the Treaty of Versailles at present limiting the arms and armed forces of Germany.

German Return to Geneva: It would also be part of the general settlement that Germany should resume her place in the League of Nations with a view to active membership.

The French Government and the Government of the United Kingdom trust that the other Governments concerned may share these views.

A Pact Against Sudden Air Aggression: In the course of these meetings the British and French Ministers have been impressed by the special dangers to peace created by modern developments in the air, the misuse of which might lead to sudden aerial aggression by one country upon another, and have given consideration to the possibility of provision being made against these dangers by a reciprocal regional agreement between certain Powers.

It is suggested that the signatories would undertake immediately to give the assistance of their air forces to whichever

of them might be the victim of unprovoked aerial aggression by one of the contracting parties.

Italy, Germany and Belgium Invited: The British and French Ministers, on behalf of their respective governments, found themselves in agreement that a mutual arrangement of this kind for Western Europe would go far to operate as a deterrent to aggression and to insure immunity from sudden attacks from the air, and they resolved to invite Italy, Germany and Belgium to consider with them whether such a convention might not be promptly negotiated.

They earnestly desire that all the countries concerned would appreciate that the object of this proposal is to reinforce peace, the sole aim pursued by the two governments.

The Governments of France and the United Kingdom declare themselves ready to resume their consultations without delay after having received the replies of the other interested Powers.

Sir John Simon, of course, made it clear in his broadcast that night that the proposed air pact placed no additional burdens on England except that it gave greater precision to Britain's commitments under Locarno; but that, on the other hand, it gave Britain the benefit of foreign assistance, which Locarno did not provide. Some observers thought that the British Government showed, as usual, a little too much interest in Western security, and not enough in security in general; and the French Socialists also complained that the question of disarmament had been completely ignored during the London talks. Still, Laval and Flandin, and Mr. MacDonald and Sir John Simon all thought it very hopeful, and on the night of the Declaration, Laval said to the Press: 'I hope with all my heart that Germany will receive the results of our work with sympathy. We have worked for peace.' And in a broadcast that night he said:

'After the Saar plebiscite and the Rome accords, our conversations of London mark an important date in diplomatic history. With all our hearts M. Flandin and I hope that the results of our work will be given a cordial welcome.

'We hope, too, that Germany will respond to the pressing call we are making to her.

'The London declaration emphasises the good spirit common to both France and Britain and emphasises the solidarity of our interests. It is our common hope to pursue and to achieve methodically the organisation of the security of Europe. We have worked hard for peace.'

Anyway, here was the basis for a new peace settlement; and, in particular, the door had been left wide open for an armaments agreement with Germany and a 'legalisation' of German rearmament. But Hitler preferred not to discuss the matter.

A few weeks later, and before any conversations had begun (for owing to Hitler's 'cold' Sir John Simon's visit to Berlin was postponed) Germany found what she thought to be a good excuse for simply tearing up Part Five of the Treaty of Versailles. This excuse was the government's proposal, voted by the French Chamber on March 15, to increase

1. from one year to eighteen months the service of the recruits to be called up in April 1935, and
2. from one year to two years the service of those to be called up in October 1935 and in the following four years – 1936, 1937, 1938 and 1939.

The normal size of the French army, as defined by the General Staff in 1927, and confirmed by the Army Act of 1928, is 521,000 men, composed as follows:

An annual 'class' of recruits; about..	240,000
Professional soldiers (largely for training the recruits and partly for colonial service)..	106,000
North African natives	90,000
Colonial (black and yellow) natives	85,000
	521,000

In addition, there are Republican Guards, the Foreign Legion, the Gendarmerie, etc., who bring the total to about 590,000. Of these, however, an important proportion are stationed in overseas territories and even in 1930, before the 'lean years' had begun, there were less than 400,000 soldiers stationed in France itself.

The 'lean years' – that is the years in which there would be a shortage of recruits owing to the low birth-rate during the War – had been, for some years past, a matter of grave concern to the successive French Governments, especially in view of the growing rearmament in Germany. In 1932 M. Daladier had devised a number of expedients (such as re-enlistments and the reduction of the recruiting age from twenty-one to twenty); but in 1935 these were no longer considered adequate.

One had to face the fact that Germany was rearming night and day; and, as M. Flandin said, in defending the 'Two-Years Bill', there would be, without it, a fall in the number of recruits from about 250,000 in 1934 to an average of 118,000 during the 'lean years' (1935-9); and in 1936, there would be only 208,000 men with the colours in France, unless one added to these the 72,000 colonial troops 'temporarily' stationed in France. But even 280,000 was little compared with German effectives, which he estimated at 600,000. With the two-year service, France could at least be certain of a standing army of 400,000 men.

One should add that there were certain compensations. Thus, under the French system of reserves, another 600,000 would be 'immediately available'; but how useful these reserves are, who have served only one year in the army, was a matter of some doubt. Moreover, Germany had already then, according to the report by M. Archimbaud, the Rapporteur of the Army Committee, a well-trained reserve of over four million men. Secondly, France still had, in 1935, a certain superiority over Germany in the quality of her army material; and then there were the frontier fortifications which were built with a view to compensating France to some extent for the reduction in effectives following the introduction of the one-year service in 1928. Still, none of these compensations seemed sufficient.

At all events, the Chamber voted the 'two years' by 350 votes to 196, and 39 abstentions. The Radicals were divided; even those who voted for the government had insisted that the two-year service should be limited only to the lean years and be subject to alteration in case of better international conditions; but the Socialists and Communists were deadly hostile to the two years.

M. Blum was particularly angry.

> The two-years' service, he said, would in all probability be permanent and not temporary, for the divergence between French and German effectives would continue even after 1940. He claimed that the two-years' service was not necessary at present. France had spent seven milliards on fortifications and one of the arguments was that it would make a reduction in effectives possible. There was at the root of all this a campaign in favour of a militarist policy, and that precisely at a

time when France was happily beginning to get rid of Fascist influences. (During those months the Croix de Feu were lying very low.) The alarmist campaign in the press was in full swing, M. Blum said. In fact, those who were clamouring for the two-year service were less concerned about effectives than about the quality of the army. It was argued that two-year recruits made better soldiers than one-year recruits, and this, M. Blum said, suggested that the General Staff were determined to turn what looked like an emergency measure into a permanent system. The General Staff had Napoleonic ambitions, and were anxious to create a shock army suitable for aggressive ends (cries of 'No!'). If Hitler's Germany were to attack France, he was certain that the working class would rise like one man to defend the country.

On the other hand France could never win the armaments race against Germany, and if there were people who believed war to be inevitable, they should start a preventive war while France was still stronger. For his own part, he (Blum) did not believe that war was inevitable. He was pleased to say that France had done much in recent years to promote the ideal of international co-operation. Would it not be better if, instead of increasing her armaments, she now made a last appeal to the world? Moreover a strong professional army was a menace to the Republic. The only means of stopping the German menace was to get the other Powers to agree unanimously on a programme of disarmament and to force it upon Germany.

The speech is a typical example of Blum as 'leader of the Opposition'.

The two-year service was naturally very unpopular in the country – for the average Frenchman takes no pride in wearing a uniform, and considers his term of military service as a mere nuisance, which should be got over as quickly as possible. And for weeks and months afterwards the Socialists continued to protest against the two-years' service, and *'A bas les deux ans'* was scribbled in chalk and charcoal on innumerable walls in Paris.[1]

But although popular feeling was strongly opposed to the 'two years' at first, it soon accepted the change as inevitable. Nobody regarded Hitler's conscription law as something that could have been avoided by not introducing the

[1] An old lady just over from England, on seeing one of these inscriptions, said to me one day: 'I suppose Monsieur Laval is one of the donkeys, but who is the other?'

two-year service. Had the two-year bill come before the Chamber not a day before, but a day after the Hitler coup, it would have received a far larger majority.

The Communists became more rapidly reconciled to the 'two years' than the Socialists. Stalin's statement to Laval during the latter's visit to Moscow in May, that 'he welcomed the military policy of the French Government which consisted in maintaining the army at a level consistent with France's security' was of decisive importance. The French Communists dropped their campaign against the 'two years'; and even the Socialists, in spite of Blum's attack on Stalin's 'unfortunate and ill-considered statement', did not persist – with the exception of the extreme Left Wing under Marceau Pivert, who, as late as May 1936, advocated at the Socialist Congress, amidst loud cheers from the gallery, and much to the embarrassment of M. Léon Blum, the Premier-Elect, the abolition of the 'Two Years'.

The Hitler coup of March 16, created more annoyance than surprise in France. In a military sense, it was of no great importance, for German rearmament had been an open secret for a long time. But, diplomatically, it was a serious matter. The purpose of the German Government's move was obviously to deprive the signatories of the Rome and London agreements of any bargaining weapon. Germany's adherence to the system of international co-operation was to be 'paid for' with the abolition of the military clauses and the Treaty of Versailles. The obvious conclusion was that Germany could now well afford to reject the security plans that Sir John Simon was going to submit to Hitler during the following week. By tearing up the Treaty of Versailles, and precisely at a time when the Powers were particularly anxious to organise peace in Europe with German collaboration (which was not the case, for instance, under Barthou), Germany was rendering a singularly bad service to the cause of a better understanding between the European nations – an understanding that Laval had sincerely desired.

What was Laval going to do about it?

'Consultation' became the watchword of the Quai d'Orsay. Laval instructed his Ambassadors to communicate immediately with the British and Italian Governments, with a view

to a Three-Power Conference. The British Ministers were, naturally, away for the week-end.

Both Right and Left in France began to feel that a close understanding with Russia had become more essential than ever, and it was decided that Laval would go to Moscow, not in June, but much earlier, if possible.

Mr. Eden was also preparing to go to Moscow and Warsaw; and there was no reason why his plans should be altered as a result of the Hitler coup. Only would Sir John Simon go to Berlin? During the previous week Hitler, much annoyed by the British White Paper, had developed a cold, and Simon's visit was postponed. In the interval the 'coup' had taken place. Would the British Foreign Secretary, the French asked, still go to Berlin as if nothing had happened? Sir John decided to go. There was an uproar in the French Press: 'Britain Condones Scrap of Paper Policy.' 'A Breach of Faith' and so on. In the end, however, harmony was restored. It was arranged that Sir John's visit to Berlin would be sandwiched between a small Three-Power Meeting in Paris, on Saturday, March 23 (with Mr. Eden and Signor Suvitch as the British and Italian representatives) and a full-dress Three-Power Meeting somewhere in Northern Italy a few weeks later. The Paris meeting was mainly symbolic; but France's honour was saved. The *communiqué* published after the meeting recalled that Sir John Simon's visit to Berlin would be 'purely exploratory' in character; that the scope of his conversations with Hitler would be 'that agreed upon in the London *communiqué*', and that a Three-Power Conference would meet at Stresa on April 11.

Sir John Simon's visit to Berlin on March 25–6 and (to quote the *communiqué*) his 'frankest and friendliest talks' with Hitler did not in any way improve the chances of the London programme. But, apart from that, the visit was not unilluminating – especially if we accept the overwhelming story told by the *Daily Telegraph* that Hitler outlined to Sir John Simon a programme very much on the lines of *Mein Kampf*, complete with the annexation of the German-speaking parts of Czechoslovakia, etc. It has also been suggested that during Sir John's visit to Berlin the ground was prepared for the subsequent Anglo-German naval treaty.

At all events, Sir John Simon and Mr. Eden were much impressed by Hitler's grasp of foreign affairs; – which was different from Arthur Henderson's experience two years earlier, when Hitler (as Henderson told me at the time) 'flew up in the air and bellowed platitudes for an hour on end'. 'It was no good arguing with him,' Henderson said. 'I just sat and waited.' But in two years Hitler had learned a great deal, and knew to perfection all the weak points of British and French diplomacy.

. . . . . .

In spite of some British opposition to such a move, France had almost instantly appealed to the League Council against Germany's violation of the Treaty of Versailles; and the French protest was among the subjects to be discussed at the Three-Power Conference at Stresa, which met on April 11, five days before the meeting of the League Council.

Stresa was full of comedy; – and rather grim comedy when one looks back on it.

EXTRACTS FROM A STRESA DIARY

April 9. Got here to-night. There is no one at Stresa yet except old Sisley. It was raining on the other side of the Simplon; but here it is warm, and I can see the moon shining through the palm-trees over Lago Maggiore. After supper, Sisley and I went for a stroll through the hotel gardens, but found it rather depressing. In ghostly silence carabinieri were looking out from behind every tree, the whites of their eyes glittering in the moonlight. It was not much better on the promenade along the lake. Here, too, we kept running into Blackshirts and carabinieri. So we went back to the hotel and ordered a couple of gin-fizzes. There are only two big hotels here – one for the delegations, the other for us.

April 10. I bought half a dozen Italian papers, all of which announced in the same terms that the Duce was coming to Stresa by seaplane to-day, and that it was no good expecting too much from the Conference. They all made the same ironical remarks about Sir John Simon who, in the House of Commons last night, had described Stresa as an object of 'exploration'.

It's a gloriously sunny day, and the Promenade is black with Blackshirts. Dozens of people have arrived here by the night train. Many familiar faces. We went to the Villa Azalea where the Italian Under-Secretary for Press and Propaganda is personally in charge of the Press cards. Italy's Goebbels is called Count Ciano. He is the Duce's son-in-law and a young man with charming manners. He gave me my card without any difficulty. There is going to be a record number of journalists here – worse even than Saarbrücken.

At noon an official of the Ministry of Propaganda took us on a cruise to Isola Bella, where we were going to be shown the interior of the Palazzo Borromeo. Only before we reached Isola Bella it was discovered that the Duce had already descended upon the lake in his seaplane, with the result that we were taken not to, but merely round the island, which was already flying the Duce's pale blue flag with the golden fascio. We saw the seaplane floating on the lake, and admired the Palazzo from a respectful distance. A little hook-nosed Pole kept pestering the official of the Ministry of Propaganda with silly questions. 'On what floor is the Duce living?' 'On the second floor,' the official replied. 'And is there a lift?' the Pole persisted. Laughter. 'No, there is no lift.' The Pole turned round and said that there was nothing funny in what he had asked; many old palaces had been fitted with modern conveniences.

In the afternoon a band outside my window was practising the Marseillaise. Laval and Flandin arrived to-night and were welcomed at the station by the Duce in person. There were so many Blackshirts all over the place that I couldn't get anywhere near the station. The *Daily Scoop* has a big story about the French plan for Stresa. There is no French plan.

April 11. To-day the Conference started. Simon and MacDonald arrived at half-past eight. This time I was let on to the platform shortly before the train was due, and got a good eyeful of Mussolini. I had never seen him before. He looked smart in his steel-grey tunic with its gold and red embroidery, with his black tasselled bonnet and black gloves. He is still youthful and vigorous, in spite of his grey hair. A face not fanatical, but full of irony and sniggers. There he stood on the platform chatting with Suvitch and Aloisi and the other

Big Blackshirts. He has a hard square chin, but a subtle mouth. When he laughs he jerks his head back and does a little shimmy movement with his shoulders. I don't think he can take himself nearly as solemnly as he is taken by the foreign statesmen. As the train drew in his smile broadened, for at that moment the Italian band had struck up 'God Save the King' with operatic pathos. MacDonald and Simon emerged from the carriage, and Mussolini, who went forward to meet them, suddenly put on a terribly solemn and majestic look. At that point the photographers clicked their cameras.

After breakfast I saw Laval walking along the Promenade, accompanied by an enthusiastic Italian crowd composed of 100 detectives and four photographers.

At ten o'clock, while Mr. MacDonald was still alleged to be having his bath, the French delegation, looking like a top-hat chorus, drove off to Isola Bella. They were followed, half an hour later, by the British, without top-hats. The Conference is separated from the rest of the world by quarter of a mile of closely guarded water.

In the afternoon four of us went by car to Pallanza on the other side of the lake, where a great interallied ceremony was to take place on the steps of the Cadorna Mausoleum. Cadorna was the Douglas Haig of Italy. Mussolini was supposed to make a speech, and the British and French were going to lay wreaths on the Marshal's tomb. A crowd of half-police half-inhabitants lined the road from the harbour to the Mausoleum. When the boat arrived from Isola Bella they cried: 'Duce! Duce!' But there was no Duce. Instead they saw a gloomy Laval and a bewildered MacDonald, followed by Flandin and Simon who seemed to be talking about the weather. The ceremony, with detectives hopping all over the place, was most unceremonious.

To-night Mr. MacDonald was asked why Mussolini had not turned up at the Pallanza ceremony. He looked a little startled and said 'No apology was offered, and indeed, none was required!' Asked why the people had been shouting for the Duce, MacDonald said: 'Well, I am sure, I don't know. Well, perhaps – perhaps they mistook Sir John for Mussolini.' (Loud laughter.) Simon did not seem to appreciate the joke, and continued to watch Mr. MacDonald rather nervously.

I spent the evening in the hotel bar where a Scotsman from Geneva was impersonating Ramsay MacDonald amid loud shrieks of laughter. The Italian detectives looked on complacently. 'Ah! and there is something that I want to tell you, my friends, and I want you to note and remember it: and that is that we have been grreatly impressed by the corrdial welcome we have received from the Italian Government. We are – remember it – verry, verry cheered by their kindness and cordiality. And we are verry grateful to Signor Mussolini.' The English and American journalists from Rome, sitting in the hotel lounge, speak in whispers of 'Mr. Smith' and 'Mr. Murphy'. The others, who know no better, talk about 'Mussolini'. This shocks the Italian detectives who are used to 'Smith' and 'Murphy'.

April 12. A sensation was caused this morning by the Six Points of Britain's foreign policy, published in all the London papers and alleged to have emanated from Mr. Neville Chamberlain. On being shown the Six Points, a member of the British Delegation looked puzzled and declared that he had never seen such piffle in all his life.

I had noticed among the journalists this morning a Gräfin Röder or Schlöder, a *femme de confiance* of Dr. Goebbels, whom I had already seen at Saarbrücken. She used to act as secretary to the Deutsche Front, and was nicknamed Stenogräfin. As we were having tea on the hotel terrace overlooking the lake this afternoon, along comes the Stenogräfin and chooses, of all the empty tables, the one next to ours. She must have heard what we were saying.

To-night the British Delegation no longer dismissed the Six Points as piffle, but spoke, instead, of the unprecedented indiscretion of the Press, and of the great annoyance caused thereby to the Cabinet Minister in question. 'And anyway,' they added, 'Stresa, and not London is the place where our foreign policy is being shaped.' Sir John Simon has announced that Hitler is prepared to enter a non-aggression pact in the East, with all Germany's neighbours, except Lithuania. He has had this confirmed from Berlin, and is looking very pleased with himself.

Later to-night Mussolini gave a banquet at the Hotel Borromeo. None of the great journalists, who had brought

their tails with them, were invited. They are being tolerated here, but no more.

In the bar, the same Scotsman from Geneva has again been impersonating Ramsay MacDonald, amidst general hilarity. 'Therre arre peace-loverrs and therre arre peace-makerrs, and we at Strraysa arre the peace-makerrs. The peace-loverr sits back in his arrmchairr, but we, the peace-makerrs –'

April 13. The Conference seems to be running smoothly towards a conclusion. In the morning somebody spread the rumour that Hitler had arrived from Berlin by aeroplane. But it was not true. A crowd of us went off for lunch to the Isola dei Pescatori, noted for its fish and spaghetti. Owing to the Duce's presence no motor-boats are allowed on to the lake, and we had to take a rowing-boat. The two old Italians rowed us slowly past Isola Bella, whence the Blackshirts were keeping a close watch on our boat. In the evening Vincent Sheean took me across the lake to the cottage he had rented some months ago. 'This is Lombardy,' he said. 'This is real, eternal Italy.' We sat at the inn with the village people; and kind and friendly people they were. The blacksmith's apprentice, a whimsical fellow with the face of a harlequin, was like a survival of a better Italy. He seemed unperturbed by the Fascist militiaman who stood silently at the door.

April 14. Early this morning we returned to Stresa through wind and rain. The Conference will be over by noon. The band outside is again practising God Save the King and the Marseillaise. They will have to play it again to-night when Mussolini sees the Statesmen off.

Before departing, Ramsay MacDonald expressed great satisfaction with the result of the Conference, and said that *Britain, France and Italy had shown the greatest unity of purpose.* 'As for Germany – we have given her – I don't like to call it a warning – but we have indicated our feelings about it, and expressed regrets, and are still anxious to take up the work of consolidating peace that has been interrupted.'

'AND DID YOU NOT DISCUSS ABYSSINIA WITH MUSSOLINI?' somebody asked. Mr. MacDonald stared. 'MY FRIEND,' he replied sharply, 'YOUR QUESTION IS IRRELEVANT.'

The results of the Stresa Conference were: an Anglo-Italian declaration in which these two powers solemnly reaffirmed their obligations as guarantors under the Treaty of Locarno; a joint resolution of Six Points:

> 1. Common line of conduct to be pursued at Geneva in connection with France's appeal to the League Council against Germany's violation of the Treaty of Versailles. 2. Reaffirmation of the necessity of Austrian independence,and the calling of a Danubian Conference in Rome at an early date. 3. Eastern Pact negotiations to be continued. 4. Negotiations to be opened for a Western air pact. 5. Regret at Germany's violation of the Treaty of Versailles, but desire to reach an agreement on limitation of armaments. 6. The desire for a revision of the military status expressed by Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria has been taken into consideration,

and, finally a joint declaration in which the three Powers

> 'find themselves in complete agreement in opposing by all practicable means any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the peace of Europe.'

And that at a time when 200,000 Blackshirts had already been dispatched to Eritrea, and when Mussolini's war preparations were already in full progress. But the question was 'irrelevant' to the British. In the circumstances it was naturally, equally 'irrelevant' to the French. They were greatly pleased with the formation of what they called the 'Stresa Front'; and preparations were made at Stresa for the subsequent military convention for the withdrawal of troops on either side of the Franco-Italian frontier.

The purely platonic resolution condemning Germany's action was voted unanimously by the League Council a few days later (Denmark alone abstaining); and that was the end of the matter.

As for the proposed Danubian Conference in Rome, it never took place at all.

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After long and troublesome negotiations and much hesitation and resistance, Laval signed the Franco-Soviet Pact on May 2. It was a strictly 'League' pact, and France's intervention on behalf of Russia was virtually subordinated to the non-opposition of the Locarno guarantors.

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> 'The provisions of the Treaty,' the Protocol that was attached to it said, 'shall not be carried out in any way which being inconsistent with the treaty obligations undertaken by one of the Contracting Parties, might expose the latter to sanctions of an international character.'

The treaty was naturally 'left open' for Germany to join. It was a normal League treaty, and was intended as part of the proposed general system of mutual assistance pacts. In case of disagreement on the League Council (Article Fifteen, paragraph seven) France and Russia were to come to one another's assistance.[1] Lengthy consultations had gone on between M. Laval and the British Government; and before being signed, the final form of the treaty *had been approved by London*. It is important to emphasise this in view of the approval with which Hitler's arguments about the incompatibility of the Franco-Soviet Pact and Locarno were to meet in the British Press after Germany's repudiation of Locarno.

The signing of the Franco-Soviet Pact was generally approved in France; the Left regarded it as a contribution to the system of collective security, and the Right – or most of it – as a contribution to France's national security. M. de Kerillis, who was to rage against the Pact after the fall of Laval in January 1936, was still all in favour of it in 1935. He had gone to Moscow during the previous summer, and had written glowing articles in praise of the Russian army and air force. The subsequent hostility of the Right to the pact, and their desperate efforts to prevent its ratification are one of the most remarkable recent developments in France. Laval himself was perhaps not quite sure at any time about the desirability of this pact; for although he signed it, he made every effort – as we shall see later – to postpone its ratification. After signing the pact he went to Moscow, where he had a long conversation with Stalin. The most important result of this meeting was Stalin's approval of the military policy of the Laval Government; – that is, of the two-years' service. The Communist campaign against the 'two years' ceased immediately.

Laval was to remain at the Quai d'Orsay for eight more

[1] This was Germany's principal grievance against the Pact – though the 'Locarno' pacts between France and Poland, and France and Czechoslovakia made exactly the same provision.

months – until January 1936. The almost exclusive concern of European diplomacy during those eight months was Abyssinia. France's attitude to the Italian-Abyssinian conflict will be dealt with in a later chapter.

CHAPTER IX

CHAMBER VERSUS BANK OF FRANCE

THE DOUBLE CABINET CRISIS OF MAY–JUNE 1935

On May 30, the Flandin Government – the eighth since the 1932 election – was overthrown. Like most French Governments, it fell on a financial issue; but in circumstances that had a graphic quality, and left a deep impression on public opinion. Never before had the political influence of the Bank of France been revealed so clearly.[1]

Shortly after taking office in November 1934 M. Flandin declared that he would choose 'neither deflation nor devaluation'. He hoped, instead, to revive the economic life of the country with a more generous credit policy. But although, with that end in view, he appointed a new Governor to the Bank of France, the Regency Council of the Bank soon gained control over the Governor, and M. Flandin's policy (whether right or wrong), was not even given a chance. In May 1935, when the crisis came, the Budget was, naturally, unbalanced – just as it had been for years – for in spite of the successive economy cuts (or, as advocates of the purchasing power theory would say, because of them), the deficit had actually grown; and in the three previous years the public debt had been increased by something like seventy milliard francs.

Even so, there was nothing peculiarly dramatic in the situation in the spring of 1935. On March 29, the gold reserve at the Bank of France stood very nearly at its record figure – 82,634 million francs. But then, at first slowly, and then with unprecedented speed, the gold began to run out. During May, the Bank lost nearly ten milliards of gold. It was the first of the three 'panics', which in one year were to bring the gold reserve of the Bank down from over eighty milliards to just over fifty milliards.

The causes of this 'panic' were rather complex. But, about

[1] For the political powers of the Bank of France see Chapter XX.

the beginning of April it was learned that a large number of bonds would mature for repayment on June 15, and that the government could not pay – unless it made friends again with the Bank of France. Making friends with the Bank meant enforcing severe cuts on the Budget; and yet, M. Flandin had declared that he would not resort to further deflation; but the Premier's dilemma gave the devaluationists their chance. They urged Flandin to accept devaluation as the only reasonable alternative to deflation, which had shown itself incapable of curing France's ills. For months already the financial experts of the British Press had declared the devaluation of the franc to be 'a matter of weeks'; and devaluation, which for years had been regarded as rank heresy by the majority of Frenchmen, was now beginning to make notable progress – a large part of French opinion almost becoming used to the idea. A part of the Press – particularly M. Patenôtre's *Petit Journal* – had become openly devaluationist; and among politicians M. Paul Reynaud, though without any official political following, began to be listened to more and more eagerly. M. Reynaud's constituency is the 2nd Arrondissement of Paris, a district depending largely on a de-luxe export trade, and on tourists; and this added some practical weight to M. Reynaud's theories. Many Radicals and other Left-Wing deputies were also more or less openly in favour of devaluation; – or rather they considered it a painful, but necessary operation; and in the Chamber debates in May, M. Reynaud was strongly seconded by M. Marcel Déat, the Neo-Socialist leader, who had developed a boundless admiration for the 'experiment' then in progress in Belgium under the newly-formed Van Zeeland Government.

This devaluationist campaign, though still condemned by all the orthodox French economists (not least by M. Germain Martin, M. Flandin's Finance Minister, who less than a year later was to be converted to devaluationism himself), was of some importance in 'shaking confidence' – though that was naturally not its object – and in encouraging currency speculation, which attained enormous proportions in the course of May. The great sin that all critics of the Bank of France have laid at its doorstep is that this speculation on the probable devaluation of the franc during May 1935 was not checked in

any way by the Bank. Although gold was running out at an alarming speed, it took a month before the Bank of France decided to raise the bank rate from two and a half per cent first, to three per cent, and then, in rapid succession, to four per cent, and six per cent. By allowing speculation to go on unhindered for several weeks, the Bank of France was threatening the government with the prospect of a currency collapse (in addition to its earlier threat not to discount bonds), unless the government accepted the policy of deflation outlined some weeks earlier by M. de Wendel, the industrial magnate and one of the Regents of the Bank. At last, on May 23, after a long struggle, Flandin surrendered, and agreed to ask the Chamber for plenary financial powers – with a view to carrying out the programme of deflation desired by the Bank. At once the Bank rate was put up.

Flandin, as it happened, was not in a good position to put up a stiff fight. He had had his arm broken in a motor smash on May 4, was suffering constant pain, and could rise from his bed only with the greatest of efforts. He also had a Finance Minister, M. Germain Martin – a dry stick who was orthodox in his ideas, who could see no middle course between deflation and devaluation, and who preferred the former to the latter. When he was asked to explain the reasons for the flight from the franc, he would allude, in rather sinister fashion, to the municipal election of May 12, which had resulted in a great victory of the Left, and which was, as it were, the first, if still imperfect, rehearsal of the Front Populaire in action. What he meant was that the progress of the Front Populaire was undermining confidence. This greatly annoyed the Left.

To cut the story short, the Flandin Government was defeated on May 30, by a large majority, which would not consent to the plenary powers. It was a dramatic debate; the devaluationists – little Paul Reynaud, the Mickey Mouse of the Chamber, and Marcel Déat, the dapper little Auvergnat – shone as never before; then Flandin himself, with his arm in splints, and accompanied by a doctor, who sat on the Tribune on a chair behind him, and continued to feel the broken arm resting on a high velvet stand, spoke in a faint voice to the Chamber for over an hour. It was a painful exhibition – so painful that the photographers were not

allowed to take pictures. Although the Deputies cheered the Premier for his courage and endurance (when his speech was over he actually fainted), they were not impressed by his arguments; and his attack on M. Reynaud was unfair and ill-tempered. Even his announcement that M. Germain Martin had just sent in his resignation and that he (Flandin) would take over the Ministry of Finance himself did not have the desired effect. It made Germain Martin look rather like a scapegoat; the device of throwing him overboard so as to save the government at the last moment lacked in elegance; and, in any case it was clear that what Flandin needed was not an additional job (and what a job!) but a long rest cure.

During the night sitting, Herriot, Flandin's Minister of State, made a brilliant speech in favour of the plenary powers bill. Only it was not very convincing, for there were only too many people who still remembered how in 1926 Herriot overthrew the Briand–Caillaux Government because they had asked for exactly the same 'undemocratic' measure. In the end the Flandin Government was overthrown by 353 votes to 202. It was the Chamber's rebellion against the Bank of France.

The financial experts of the English Press were startled to find, the next day, that France had not gone off gold.

It was M. Bouisson, the President of the Chamber, who formed the new government, with M. Caillaux as Minister of Finance. If there was a touch of tragedy in the fall of M. Flandin, a weak but well-intentioned Liberal, who had fallen a victim to his good intentions (and to his bad driving), the one-day Cabinet of M. Bouisson was all comedy.

M. Bouisson had been for seven years President of the Chamber. He was a Marseillais, with a gruff manner, a shiny bald head, a pointed white beard, and a vast abdomen, which, together with the evening dress the Speaker always wears, gave him a certain air of majesty. As Speaker of the Chamber, he was praised for his qualities as a '*technicien*', with all the rules of Parliamentary procedure at his finger-tips. With his angry growls he usually succeeded to restore immediate order whenever the Chamber showed signs of becoming unruly. Until 1934, he had belonged to the Socialist Party; but his resignation surprised no one; for during many years his membership

of the Socialist Party had only been nominal, and Bouisson had come to consider himself as an above-party personality, with a good chance of rising to the highest office in the Republic – the Presidency – possibly with an 'above-party' Premiership in the interval. As Speaker of the Chamber, he had the reputation of being scrupulously fair; – though this opinion was not shared by the Communists, who (perhaps through their own fault) received a greater proportion of his growls than any other combination of ten deputies. But apart from that, he was very cautious in any of his political utterances, and so maintained his reputation for 'impartiality'.

After the fall of the Flandin Government, he assumed the airs of a minor Doumergue, and suddenly began to believe in his own indispensability. His government was, naturally, a 'National' Government, with Ministers of State and all that. But the most sensational feature in his Cabinet was his Minister of Finance – M. Caillaux. The English and American newspapers, in particular, became greatly excited: 'Caillaux comes to save the franc,' they splashed over their front pages. This sudden reappearance in the front rank of the French political scene of the seventy-three-year-old man added another page to the thrilling Caillaux Legend. Actually, in French eyes, Caillaux is much less of a romantic and legendary character than in British and American eyes. He is personally disliked – in his own Radical Party even more than elsewhere. His brusque and superior airs, his lack of *camaraderie,* his claim to be a gentleman '*de la haute bourgeoisie, presque de la noblesse*', as he himself wrote, offends their democratic susceptibilities. However great his reputation, especially his foreign reputation, as a financial expert, the French still remembered in June 1935 that his management of France's finances in 1925 and 1926 (when he had also 'come to save the franc'), had practically speaking been a failure.

For years M. Caillaux, as President of the Finance Committee of the Senate, had preached orthodox finance and what he called 'penance', – penance for past extravagance. He was clearly a deflationist, and no sooner was the Bouisson Government formed than the Radicals realised that Caillaux's economy cuts would be ruthless. They began to regret the overthrow of Flandin.

So France and the Franc were now in the hands of her two bald-headed doctors – Bouisson and Caillaux. Both – and especially Caillaux – behaved as if they were the only two people in the world who could still save France from disaster. Skipping up and down the steps of the Senate he would put his fingers impishly to his nose, and crow like a cock, and exclaim that he would knock hell out of the deputies. He would teach them sound finance, he would! He was exuberantly pleased with himself. And the *Information* and other financial papers praised him up to the skies.

The Chamber met on June 4. The Radicals were restive. There had been a stormy meeting of the Radical group that morning, and so great was their opposition to the government's plenary powers Bill, and to Caillaux's proposal to cut down expenditure by eight milliard francs, that Herriot, who represented the Radical Party in the government as one of the Ministers of State, threatened to resign. But although the quarrel was more or less patched up, the hostility of the Radical Deputies to the new Government became fully apparent as soon as the Chamber met.

While M. Bouisson, wearing an ordinary lounge suit for the first time in seven years (he looked much less impressive than in evening dress) was reading his Ministerial Declaration, he was being constantly heckled by the Communists, and then M. Ramette, the Communist Deputy, made a snappy speech in which he poked fun at the government. Was it not amusing, he said, to see M. Caillaux in the same government as M. Mandel, (the Minister of Posts) who nearly got him shot in 1919? He drew the attention of the Radicals to the fact that the government's financial programme was infinitely worse than anything Flandin had proposed. He also said that the Radicals had been given all the government departments whose estimates would be cut down; did they not realise that the voters in the General Election would blame them for the cuts?

The Radicals observed an embarrassed silence. M. Caillaux's spectacular appearance at the Chamber while the debate was in progress did not make matters any better. Before taking his seat he stood in front of the government bench for a while, and, fingering his monocle, surveyed the assembly

with a supercilious air. Then, in reply to questions, he consented to give a few particulars about his financial plans. He uttered every word with a superior and dictatorial air, which irritated the Chamber intensely. 'Parasite' jobs would be eliminated, he said; and as for the ex-servicemen, the 'real' ex-servicemen – those who had fought in the front line – would not be tapped until everybody else had been asked to make sacrifices. Though he did not say so, he clearly implied that heavy salary cuts would be inevitable. If the Chamber wished the franc to be saved, it must grant him plenary powers. His neck and his bald head – 'the handsomest bald head in France' – grew more and more crimson as he went on.

But the worst was yet to come. M. Bouisson, who had been condemned to neutrality and moderation during his seven years in the Speaker's chair, suddenly burst out into a stream of home truths. It was this speech, more even than M. Caillaux's plans and mannerisms, that was to kill the government. Instead of appealing to the Chamber for their confidence, he – the ex-Socialist – proceeded to poke fun at the Radicals, advising them to learn a lesson of discipline from their Socialist friends, who always voted as they were told by their leader. He also used bits of lobby gossip as a basis for personal attacks on a number of Radicals, and declared that he would not have any discussions with the Chamber until November, and if they insisted on asking him questions in the next few days, he would simply send them on holiday. In short, the government had too much serious work to do to be bothered with Parliament.

How a man who had presided over the Chamber deliberations for so many years could suffer from such a lack of psychology was truly astounding. The Chamber felt insulted – and it was going to pay him out. Without his speech he would have got his emergency powers by at least a small majority.

While the counting of the votes was in progress, there was intense excitement in the lobbies. 'Majority of ten, majority of fifteen,' the experts said, but after many counts and recounts it was discovered that the government was down by two votes. (Apart from the whole extreme Left, including sixty-five Radicals, thirty members of the Right and Centre, largely out of a dislike for Caillaux, had also voted against.) When the

Speaker read out the result, the Right and Centre rose to their feet and cheered loudly and cried 'Dissolution!' M. Tardieu, who had become outspokenly anti-parliamentarian, went up to Bouisson and shook him ostentatiously by the hand. The Left sat in glum silence, some of them wondering whether they should not have swallowed their pride after all. 'There is a certain divine justice about this vote,' M. Blum remarked in the Chamber lobbies, 'but rather a nuisance for all that.'

The greatest victim of it all was M. Bouisson himself. He was soon re-elected to the Speaker's chair, but only by a small majority, and for only a short time. His great democratic reputation was gone, and so was his hope of becoming President of the Republic. And Caillaux returned to the Senate, no doubt wondering why the Caillaux Legend had again failed to 'work'.

The next morning M. Laval agreed to form the new Cabinet. At that time, with his personal contacts in all parties, he still had an above-party reputation, and so soon after Stresa and his Moscow journey, his reputation as a Foreign Minister was at its height. The Bourse slumped, but not very heavily, and there was no evidence of any great unrest in the streets. That evening there was only one notable 'incident' – it was when a crowd of Royalists smashed the windows of the *Petit Journal* which had been advocating devaluation.

But before the end of the day Laval gave up the task. The Left-Wing Radicals, under Daladier, were playing with the idea of an anti-Fascist coalition, supported by the Communists, and were not inclined to surrender to the Bank of France after the Chamber had already scored two victories over it.

The next day M. Piétri – a very 'correct' gentleman, a Corsican – who had been Minister in several cabinets in the past, was asked to form the Cabinet. In the interval the Socialists had poured cold water on the Radical scheme for an anti-Fascist Government (they considered it impracticable without a new election), and M. Piétri therefore found the Radicals in a more helpful mood.

Nevertheless, he failed to form the Cabinet – and this for a very interesting reason. Towards the middle of the afternoon it was learned that 'he was getting on all right with the Radicals'; but now the Banks were creating difficulties. What

happened was this: the Radicals had persuaded M. Piétri not to insist on plenary powers after the Flandin and Bouisson model, but to be content with 'limited powers' – a system under which the government would be able to bring into operation a number of laws 'each with a clearly specified object'. It was obvious that under this system Caillaux's programme of deflation would be greatly watered down, and the Bank of France held that unless the Budget was, more or less, put in order, it could not and would not grant greater facilities to the Treasury. It apparently also feared that, with the Radicals holding a prominent place in the government, Piétri might be induced to take certain emergency measures against the Bank itself. The hostility of the Bank was also reflected in the response with which Piétri met from the Right. The Bank's insistence on deflation – and, consequently, on plenary powers – a demand that was clearly conveyed to Piétri by the officials of the Ministry of Finance, was the chief reason for his failure.

There was also another difficulty – this one of a political order. The Radicals wished Daladier to be given a post in the Cabinet. But the Right would not hear of it. Daladier was still *'le fusilleur'* – and Colonel de la Rocque afterwards claimed that, if only Daladier had been given a Cabinet post, the Croix de Feu would have started trouble in Paris.

On the surface, Paris was calm, and there was no evidence of any great Fascist activity. But even so, the double Cabinet crisis, which was showing no signs of coming to an end, was beginning to make people nervous. A Bourse panic was feared; and although spokesmen of the Bank of France said in private that *they* had enough gold left to hold out against the Chamber, they continued to suggest in public that unless a government with plenary powers was formed, the franc might go.

But in reality they were confident that they had won – in spite of the unexpectedly fierce resistance of the Chamber. On June 6 members of the Right kept saying in the Chamber lobbies that the political and financial unrest was growing from hour to hour, but that when it got bad enough, the Chamber would 'surrender to a Bank of France Cabinet'.

That night things had got 'bad enough'; – so bad that Laval

was able to form his Cabinet with comparatively little difficulty. He appointed M. Régnier, a Radical Senator with strong deflationist tendencies, Minister of Finance – a 'super-Caillaux', as a horrified Left-Wing Radical described him that night. A tiny little man with a grey beard, he had been nicknamed *le crabe ambulant* by Léon Daudet.

The Radicals and the Chamber were in the end obliged to climb down. But the Chamber's resistance to the Bank of France during a whole fortnight – a resistance that had brought down two Cabinets – did not pass unnoticed in the country; and encouraged the subsequent campaign against the Bank – one of the principal themes, as we shall see, of the 1936 election campaign.

Such were the circumstances in which the historical Laval Cabinet – which in the next six months was to play such a spectacular part in international affairs – was born.

It obtained its plenary powers almost without resistance from the Chamber; and on July 17 it announced its deflationist programme – an all round ten per cent cut on all Budget expenditure (except Military Expenditure and certain lower-grade government incomes), but including coupons on government securities – an unprecedented measure amounting in practice to a forced conversion. The total economies amounted to ten milliard francs. To offset the unpopularity of these measures landlords were compelled to cut all rents by ten per cent, and other (though less effective) measures were prescribed with a view to reducing the cost of living. The Budget was reduced from forty-seven milliards to forty milliards, and all 'exceptional' expenditure (particularly on armaments) with no corresponding revenue was confined to a 'special' budget of about six milliards.

There were a few protest demonstrations in Paris by civil servants; – but they were of no gravity; except that one of them held up the traffic in the Boulevards and the Place de l'Opéra for several hours one night. About ten people were slightly injured in clashes with the police. More serious were the disorders that broke out among the arsenal workers at Brest and Toulon in the second week in August. There the 'protest' against the cuts degenerated into rioting, and three people were killed in the process. Still, it was not so serious as

to warrant the vast headline 'REVOLUTION IN FRANKREICH' that caught my eye when, one evening in August, I arrived in Berlin.

On the strength of its plenary powers the Laval Government issued, before October 31, when the powers were to expire, no fewer than five hundred decrees 'for the defence of the franc'. Some of them had only a very remote connection with the franc; thus, there was one decree prohibiting foreigners living in France from keeping carrier pigeons. The Laval deflation did not, in the long run, solve the problem of the franc; nor did it balance the Budget – which was in just as bad a state only a few months later. But it had, none the less, 'restored confidence' for a while; the Bank of France denied the Laval Government no credit facilities; and the franc was saved – for a time.

There were many who afterwards wondered whether, in saving the franc in June 1935, France had not missed a good opportunity.

CHAPTER X

THE RISE OF THE FRONT POPULAIRE

'Shall France alone a Despot spurn,
Shall she alone, O Freedom, boast thy care?'
– COLERIDGE.

'Can you seriously expect the French people, who made one great, one small, and two medium revolutions, to cry out joyfully: "*Vive Henri V!*" '
– Saltykov.

THE beginning of the 'anti-Fascist rally' in France dates back to the days immediately following the riot of February 6, 1934. In the course of 1934 the Socialists and Communists drew closer together, and on August 27 of that year they signed the United Action Pact, which marks the formal beginning of what came to be known as the Front Commun. In terms of this Pact they agreed to organise a joint campaign with the following ends in view:

(*a*) To mobilise the entire working population against the Fascist organisations, which must be disarmed and disbanded.
(*b*) To defend democratic liberties.
(*c*) To prevent the preparation of a new war.
(*d*) To abolish the economy decrees of the French Government.
(*e*) To struggle against the Fascist terror in Germany and Austria.
(*f*) To demand the liberation of Thaelmann, etc.

This campaign was to be conducted by means of joint meetings in the largest possible number of places.

The two parties, though maintaining their freedom of recruitment and propaganda, would refrain from attacking and criticising those of each other's members and organisations who had adhered loyally to the pact. There must be no discussions on doctrines and tactics. A committee of seven delegates from each party was to direct this programme of action.

Actually the rank and file, much more than the leaders, wanted this 'united action'. It is true that between February and July 1934 it was the Socialists who made the first proposals

for such united action; but the Communist leaders would not accept them. Later, however, as Léon Blum claimed in the *Populaire* of February 25, 1935, there was a sudden *volte-face* on the part of the Communists, and it was they who, in turn, proposed the United Front. It was then for the Socialists to say yes; – though many of them, – Frossard, Grumbach and others – were by no means enthusiastic. Even Blum did not seem to be very sure of his new Communist allies. Only, as he later explained, it would have been impossible to say 'no'.

> 'The masses of the people would not have understood, and they would have come to dislike us. There was also a danger that our party would have split. . . . This United Action has been and may still be a source of embarrassment and irritation and may still be an object of apprehension. But it was, none the less, necessary, or if one prefers, inevitable. But, on balance, I feel that this pact has nothing to frighten us, still less to discourage us.' – *Populaire*, February 25, 1935.

The Socialist leader was not exactly enthusiastic. Later, in May, he was, as already shown, greatly distressed by Stalin's statement to Laval, 'approving of the military policy of the French Government' – which was, in substance, an approval of the two years' military service against which the Socialists had fought tooth and nail. It laid the foundations for the later Communist slogan: *Pour une France libre, forte, et heureuse.* The Socialist leaders found these directives from Moscow a little too nationalist, and inspired by Stalin's consideration that, from the point of view of Moscow, at any rate, a non-Fascist and militarily powerful France was preferable to any other.

Many Socialists even suspected Moscow of preferring a respectable bourgeois government of the Herriot type, with friendly feelings towards Moscow, to say, a Blum Government full of advanced ideas on Socialist transformations and international disarmament.

The relations between the Socialist and Communist leaders were not unduly friendly during that first half of 1935 – they had little to unite them except the determined anti-Fascism of the rank and file.

As for the Radicals, the majority of them remained loyal to bourgeois democracy and to the National Government formula

so long as the Flandin Government remained in power. But at the same time the idea of the United Anti-Fascist Front was making progress with the Radical rank-and-file. In the municipal elections of May 1935 numerous candidates of the Left were supported by Radicals, Socialists and Communists alike; and the victory in the 5th Arrondissement – the 'moderate' Latin quarter – of Paris of Professor Rivet, who was the 'anti-Fascist' candidate, over M. Lebecq, the National candidate, and one of the 'heroes' of the 6th of February, had the symbolic significance of a first resounding victory over 'Fascism'.

The election of Professor Rivet was a great encouragement to the anti-National-Government Radicals after the fall of Flandin, three weeks later. It was during this Cabinet crisis that a large number of Radicals, including M. Daladier who, since his fiasco of February 1934, had remained in the background, openly came forward in favour of close co-operation with the Socialists and Communists. Already two days before the fall of the Flandin Government the following letter was sent, after a joint meeting of the Socialist and Communist deputies, to the Radical and other moderate Left-Wing members:

'DEAR COLLEAGUE,

'After examining at our joint meeting the conditions of a concerted action against the [Flandin] Government's financial proposals, the representatives of our two parties have agreed that, in the present circumstances, it would be of great interest if their agreement could be extended to the other parties of the Left. We therefore invite you to nominate delegates for the meeting to be held on Thursday, 30th inst., at 9.30 a.m.

'For the Socialist Group,
'LÉON BLUM.
'For the Communist Group,
'RAMETTE.'

It was also the Communists who, after the fall of the Bouisson Government proposed the formation of an 'anti-Fascist' Government, 'stretching as far as M. Bonnevay'. M. Bonnevay, though a member of the Right Centre, had

shown himself scrupulously fair as Chairman of the Committee of Inquiry into the 6th of February riots, and had so become the target of violent Fascist attacks. The Communists used his name as a symbol for a genuinely democratic and anti-Fascist mentality: it was with men of such a mentality that the Communists were prepared to co-operate.

Many Radicals were fascinated by the Communist proposal; but the Socialists would not hear of it; or rather, without openly rejecting the proposal, they laid down such deliberately stiff conditions for the formation of an 'anti-Fascist' Government, that the Radicals in favour of such a combination had to abandon the idea. In any case, Blum considered the moment totally inappropriate for forming such a government; for the Chamber had no solid Left-Wing majority; it was threatened with a financial panic; and Blum did not wish to take upon himself the responsibility for devaluation. The Radicals were forced to accept the Laval Government.

Nevertheless, these conversations between Radicals, Communists and Socialists during the June Cabinet crisis revealed some interesting new possibilities and laid the foundations, as it were, for the July 14 demonstration, the real beginning of the Front Populaire.

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Nevertheless, even in June, after the Chamber's 'surrender' to the Bank of France, the Socialists were still unwilling to commit themselves to co-operation with any 'bourgeois' party. On June 9 the Socialist Congress met at Mulhouse; but during the four days it lasted the phrase 'Front Populaire' was scarcely uttered. The battle was fought between the 'revolutionary' wing led by M. Zyromski and M. Marceau Pivert, who were in favour of seizing power by 'direct action', and the 'Centre', with M. Bracke as their official spokesman, who believed in 'seizing power' by the recognised democratic method – that is, by means of an election victory.

M. Vincent Auriol, the future Minister of Finance, advocated 'united action' with the Communists, but made no reference to the Radicals; while M. Blum did not go beyond saying: 'I believe that the national duty of the proletariat can coincide with its international duty; and that is when there is a case of flagrant aggression, and the national soil is invaded.'

Even this remark set loose a storm among the Left-Wing extremists, and M. Molinais branded it as 'another piece of treachery'.

All things considered, the Socialists decided that they could not share power with any bourgeois party and that it must be 'everything or nothing'. The Radical *Œuvre* (June 13) was deeply disappointed –

> 'They have been talking a lot about the "conquest of power" at Mulhouse. For M. Zyromski it is a question of strength. In that case one has to wait until the time is ripe for an offensive. For M. Bracke it's a case of winning the election. But in both cases the victory has got to be "complete" – no compromising, no coalition government, no "Belgian Experiment". It must be everything or nothing – good and well. This is logical enough if one accepts M. Zyromski's programme.
>
> 'But if one accepts M. Bracke's view, then surely the voters will be simply duped. It will mean that the Socialist deputies will remain in Opposition unless there are 308 of them, that is, unless they obtain an absolute majority. The voters will have to wait a good long while before this happens.
>
> 'In other words, in the absence of Socialist co-operation, any election victory of the Left is doomed to failure in advance – as it was in 1924 and in 1932. Very clear, but not very encouraging!'

The *Œuvre*, with its articles by Jacques Kayser, Marcel Déat and other 'moderate' Left-Wing intellectuals continued to deplore this negative attitude of the Socialists, and to advocate the rally of all the Left-Wing, anti-Fascist forces into a united front. The campaign was supported by the Communists, who, as has been shown, had already launched, during the Cabinet crisis earlier in the month, the idea for an anti-Fascist coalition 'stretching as far as Bonnevay'. A committee founded under the auspices of the Ligue des Droits de L'Homme and composed of more or less accredited – that is, not always officially accredited – representatives of all the Left-Wing parties and numerous organisations set to work.

. . . . . .

It so happened that June 1935 was marked by a sudden reappearance on the French political scene of the Croix de Feu. The Croix de Feu, though growing in numbers and gaining in wealth, had lain very low during the Flandin period. They knew the government to be hostile to them.

The only notable Fascist incident during the first five months of 1935 was the raid by half a dozen Croix de Feu men on the Socialist headquarters in the rue Feydeau, in Paris, on the night of April 12. These men were Fascist extremists who, tired of Colonel de la Rocque's cautious attitude, had decided to resort to 'direct action' – partly, no doubt, in order to force Colonel de la Rocque's hand, and to show him that his rank and file was becoming impatient. The men were arrested on the premises; but after much beating about the bush, Colonel de la Rocque in the end simply condemned their behaviour and disavowed them. His 'cowardice' and uncomradely behaviour on that occasion created a serious conflict in the Croix de Feu ranks; and there was a danger that the resignation of several leading Croix de Feu men would be followed by a first-class split in the organisation unless the Colonel showed some 'guts'. Partly for that reason, and partly for another reason, which became apparent later, the Croix de Feu became more aggressive towards the middle of 1935 than they had ever been before.

It is true that during the double Cabinet crisis of May–June, they were not in evidence. While the crisis was in progress, they held a great rally, which caused some talk at the time – only it was held not in Paris, but at Cambrai, some 150 miles north of the capital! It was not very dangerous. In Paris, after the fall of the Bouisson Cabinet, the Croix de Feu merely displayed hundreds of rather incoherent posters, asking Frenchmen to support their movement and to attack the combined forces of the 'Capitalist and Marxist Internationals' who had overthrown the last government in less than twenty-four hours. It was said that the Croix de Feu had received strict instructions to be 'on their guard', and it was also claimed that the Communists were ready to march on Paris from the Red suburbs in the event of a Fascist *putsch*. But since there was no Fascist *putsch* there was also no Red march on Paris. For one thing, it was really difficult to expect ex-servicemen and their juniors to rise in wrath simply because the Chamber had turned out *le traître* Caillaux, who was proposing to cut ex-servicemen's pensions.

But once Laval was safely in the saddle, the fun started. 'Giant' rallies and mobilisation exercises began to be held in

various parts of France, and the behaviour of the Croix de Feu became rather alarming. It looked as though the cautious Colonel had suddenly turned over a new leaf. He swore that the Croix de Feu had been 'on their guard' during the Cabinet crisis, and that there would have been some fun – *il y aurait eu du sport* – if *le fusilleur* Daladier had been included in the new government (M. Piétri had actually considered the possibility) and, becoming bolder and bolder, the Colonel proclaimed that 'he did not care a hang for legality', and that the Croix de Feu would 'take command' at the appropriate moment.

The most impressive rally – in the course of which many ominous speeches were made – took place at Algiers, complete with thirty aeroplanes belonging to the Croix de Feu organisation; and there were also many other rallies mostly held on the estate of some wealthy patron, without warning and with 'lightning speed' – the speed being provided by the motor-cars belonging to members of the association. On several occasions the roads leading to these 'secret rallies' were policed by Croix de Feu men.

What was to account for this sudden display on the part of the Croix de Feu? For one thing, Colonel de la Rocque had to keep his extremist followers contented after the conflict that had broken out in the movement after the burglary in the rue Feydeau; secondly, many of the Croix de Feu people felt that in failing to do anything during the double Cabinet crisis, beyond holding a meeting at Cambrai, and sticking up some inane posters in Paris – which was at the time in a growing state of 'nerves' – La Rocque had again missed an opportunity. He had to convince his followers that there were better opportunities ahead, which would not be missed.

But lastly, and perhaps above all, the Croix de Feu leaders suddenly realised that there now sat at the head of the government not a hostile Flandin, but Laval who, they had reason to believe, was not unsympathetic to the movement, and with whom friendly co-operation – like the old co-operation with Doumergue – might be possible. What made the Croix de Feu think so? Colonel de la Rocque had met Laval before. The encouragement Laval had given in December 1934 to Jean Goy – an ex-servicemen's leader with a Croix de Feu

mentality – to go and see Hitler, and also his friendly relations with Mussolini, had suggested to La Rocque that Laval was not a narrow-minded democrat. Laval was also a man who, as everybody knew, could get on with anybody, and judge anybody on his own merits. He stood 'above-party'; and as La Rocque soon discovered, it did not take long to convince Laval that the Croix de Feu were 'interesting' people, with a great deal of excellent human material among them. As time went on, and as the hostility between Laval and the Socialists and Communists grew, the relations between him and the Croix de Feu became more cordial. An intimate friend of his repeated to me – I think it was a little later, in October – the following reflection that Laval made to him in a moment of candour: 'Yes, I am on good terms with the Croix de Feu. *Ce sont des vrais français.* They include some of the finest elements of the youth of France. They will become some day the backbone of a real big anti-capitalist, though non-Marxist, party. I like them. *Que voulez vous que je fasse?*' he said wistfully. 'My old Socialist and Communist comrades will not have anything more to do with me. Who can I fall back on in the circumstances?'

In June, Laval had not yet reached that stage; but even then he already felt that, call them Fascist or whatever you like, the Croix de Feu represented a vital force in the country, and had the same right to live and exist as any Communists or Socialists or Front Populaire. There were curious analogies between his international outlook and his domestic outlook. Even so, he was more cautious than Doumergue, and would never identify himself with them completely.

As was to be expected, the Left became greatly alarmed by the sudden revival in the energies of the Croix de Feu. Their 'lightning mobilisations' in different parts of France had shown among other things, that, in the last six months, they had made considerable progress in provincial France. In 1934 the whole movement was virtually still confined to Paris. It was the Délégation des Gauches[1] who, on June 24 – about a fortnight after the formation of the Laval Cabinet – asked the Premier what he was going to do about the Croix de Feu.

[1] This standing committee of *all* the Left-Wing parties, which was formed about that time, was to play an increasingly important part under the Laval and Sarraut Governments. Laval was to find it very troublesome.

They already strongly suspected Laval of being in sympathy with the Fascists, for on the previous Thursday, June 20, Laval had flatly refused the request of M. Rucart, the Radical deputy (later Minister of Justice in the Blum Cabinet), to discuss immediately a bill regulating street demonstrations and the activities of the semi-military leagues. Rather than discuss this bill, he said, he would send the Chamber immediately on holiday, for the government had all the necessary means of maintaining order in the Republic. The Chamber acquiesced, some Radicals voting for, others against the adjournment. But at the Cabinet meeting on the following day, Herriot again raised the question of the Croix de Feu and said that the activities of this League – their rally at Algiers with the thirty aeroplanes had just taken place – were becoming an intolerable provocation. He was warmly supported by M. Lebrun, the President of the Republic (who had never got over the rioting outside the Élysée Palace on the 6th February); but Laval again declared that everything would be done to maintain law and order.

That same night the Ministry of the Interior prohibited the proposed (mainly Left-Wing) procession in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Victor Hugo – a procession which was to march to the Panthéon, where the poet is buried – on the ground that no street demonstrations, whether of the Left or of the Right, were to be tolerated. Yet on the following day (Saturday) Colonel de la Rocque organised a rally of some 20,000 Croix de Feu men in the neighbourhood of Chartres, and the roads along which they travelled were policed by Croix de Feu men. At the Cabinet Meeting of June 25, this act of defiance by the Croix de Feu gave rise to a heated protest from M. Herriot. In the afternoon a delegation of the Left-Wing parties appeared before Laval, and wished to know, before Parliament had risen, whether the government would tolerate any further 'Fascist provocation'. Among the delegates were MM. Blum, Vincent Auriol (Socialists), Delbos and Daladier (Radicals) – all future members of the Front Populaire Government, and Thorez (Communist).

Laval, fingering his white tie, declared that he was greatly concerned about the situation. 'I shall defend the Republic,'

he said, putting the maximum of warmth into his voice; '*Mes amis*, I owe everything to the Republic; how would I not be devoted to it?' The Chartres rally had surprised him greatly, and he was determined – yes, determined! – to prevent a repetition of such an affair. 'I have full authority from the Chamber to defend the franc, and any political disorder in France is a menace to the franc; and if I therefore find that the police must be increased, I shall do it. The government will take action against anyone – whether Right or Left – threatening public order.'

'Indeed, I learn,' he said, 'that the Croix de Feu are proposing to fly their aeroplanes over the "Red" suburbs of Paris on July 14. This I shall never tolerate. Any such aeroplanes will be forced down. The Chartres rally was illegal; and every action will be taken to prevent such rallies in future.'

The Left deputies returned to the Chamber delighted with *le Président*.

Two days later, before the Chamber rose for the summer vacation, M. Laval repeated his assurances from the Tribune of the Chamber – though in a milder and less emphatic manner.

> 'However, the exact words do not matter,' the *Œuvre* wrote. 'What matters is that the government should act. Besides, if the government has promised to be attentive and vigilant, it may also be sure that it will not be alone. Public opinion – from the most extreme to the most moderate of true republicans – is also on its guard. That will be the true meaning of the grandiose demonstration of July 14. It will show two things – first, that contrary to what is said by some, the forces of the Left are orderly and disciplined; and secondly, that they are sufficiently numerous and sufficiently disciplined to stand up, if necessary, to the forces aiming at the destruction of the régime.'

July 28, the day on which Parliament rose – was, indeed, an important day in the history of the Front Populaire. A meeting took place that night at the Mutualité to celebrate the 'symbolic' victory of Professor Rivet, the anti-Fascist candidate in the recent municipal election. The three speakers at the meeting were MM. Daladier, Blum and Thorez. Although M. Blum said that he was attending the meeting 'in

a personal capacity', it was new to see the Radical, Socialist and Communist leaders speak from the same platform.

'The Front Populaire that has come into being in the 5th Arrondissement,' M. Blum said, 'must come into being in the whole of France.' He went on to say that it was important, above all, to have a minimum programme.

M. Daladier received a tremendous ovation from the audience; – for it was his presence at the meeting that symbolised the extension of the Front Commun to the proportions of a Front Populaire.

> 'There will be some,' he said, 'who will to-morrow declare it to be a scandal that a Radical ex-Premier should have spoken from the same platform as a Socialist and Communist. But I represent the *petite bourgeoisie* and I declare that the middle class and the working class are natural allies.'

He proceeded to show that the greatest evil in France was the financial oligarchy. So long as it had not been destroyed, and so long as credit was not under the control of the government, any government of the Republic would be at the mercy of this oligarchy. The Fascists merely represented this oligarchy. The Premier of the 6th of February was clearly rehabilitating himself in this new role.

M. Thorez, the young Communist leader, declared that the Communists also wished to join the Front Populaire, to defend the liberties of the working class. All three speakers agreed that their adherence to the Front Populaire did not imply any loss of independence.

The meeting created a sensation in Paris. It was clearly the beginning of something new and possibly something very big.

In the meantime the Organisation Committee of the July 14 demonstration – a Committee comprising representatives of forty-eight parties and associations (though not always officially accredited representatives), including the Radicals, Socialists, Communists, the two trade union federations, the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, the anti-Fascist Intellectuals, etc., had drawn up 'an appeal to the people of France' which was published on the following day:

> 'July 14 – an immense rally of all the forces determined to defend liberty. . . . On July 14, 1789, the people of France captured the Bastille and revealed Liberty to the world. A

hundred and fifty years of continuous effort and four revolutions enabled them to keep and consolidate the ground they had conquered. We call upon you to take up again the great revolutionary tradition, which made of July 14 a day of remembrance and hope, and the expression of the people's will.

'To-day armed Fascist organisations are preparing to launch an attack on Liberty and the Republic.... Against this imminent danger we launch an appeal for unity to all those who wish to liberate the nation from the stranglehold of the financial powers, of the new feudalism, and to all those who wish to keep what they have conquered in the past, and who look forward to a better future. Since 1789 every defeat of the People has been the outcome of its lack of unity. The neighbouring democracies have been crushed because the defenders of liberties had failed to rise like one man against the common enemy.... We swear to remain united to defend Democracy, to disarm and dissolve the Fascist Leagues, to render our liberties immune against Fascist attacks. We swear, on the day on which we shall commemorate the first victory of the Republic, to defend the democratic liberties conquered by the people of France, to give bread to the workers, work to the young, and a great human peace to the world.'

Of course, neither the Blum–Thorez–Daladier meeting, nor the oath of July 14, had really settled anything as far as the Radicals were concerned. After all, the President of the Radical Party was a member of M. Laval's National Government; and a large part of the Radicals at the Chamber had supported this government. The situation needed some clearing up. The Executive Committee of the Radical Party met on July 2, and there was an immediate clash between the two Edouards – Daladier and Herriot. Daladier thundered against the Bank of France, while Herriot declared that 'one could not start a battle against the creditors of whom one stood in need every day and every hour'. By restoring her Budget balance, the Republic would regain her freedom, he said. And he also quoted the high example of the British National Government – an example worthy of imitation.

For all that, Herriot took the Fascist menace very seriously. Documents, he said, had been discovered which showed that plans were being made for transforming tourist planes into bombing planes; and that nurses were to be trained for the civil war. All this was intolerable. The Republic was France's permanent form of government.

Coming to the most delicate problem – the Front Populaire – Herriot said: 'All these threats have not only created anxiety; they have awakened in the country the democratic conscience of all democratic elements. The Parties of the extreme Left [the Socialists and Communists] have realised that republican freedom is the condition for all other forms of freedom, including the freedom of thought, and that is why the Radicals can only welcome the tribute that will be paid to the Republic at the Bastille on July 14.'

But one had to go about it cautiously, Herriot said, and the Radical Party must not lose its independence, 'and, for my own part,' he added, 'I want to fight for the Republic, but under the three colours of the national flag.'

A person in the hall exclaimed: 'So you won't have the Red Flag?' Herriot made no reply.

In the end it was decided that the Radicals would take part in the July 14 procession carrying tricolours and singing the Marseillaise (not the Internationale) and that the question of adhering to the Front Populaire would not be discussed until later. So Herriot got out of the difficulty – though on July 14 Lyons was one of the few towns in France where the Radical procession was distinct from that of the Socialists and Communists. A prominent member of the right wing of the party – M. Pfeiffer – whose speech was loudly booed, resigned from the Radical Party that night. He declared that he would not belong to a Party that was going to sell itself body and soul to the Communists.

What were the Croix de Feu – the real creators of the Front Populaire – doing in the meantime? On July 7 Colonel de la Rocque made one of the most incendiary speeches in his life. He 'no longer cared a hang about legality', and prophesied that the Croix de Feu would soon take power.

It was then – so it was said in Paris at the time – that Laval intervened. The next day an article by Colonel de la Rocque appeared in *Excelsior* which was a complete climb down. The Croix de Feu, he said, were 'certainly not Fascists'; and there was no question of abolishing Parliamentary Government. Parliament would simply be given a 'different status'. Moreover, the Colonel strongly protested against the allegation that

the Croix de Feu were being subsidised by financial and industrial magnates.

Laval must have told him that his Sunday speech was placing the government in an impossible position, and that the speech must be 'toned down'. Hence the article. But at the same time – or about the same time – Laval decided to allow the Croix de Feu to hold a demonstration of their own in the Champs-Élysées on July 14. There could be no doubt that Laval had made a deal with the Colonel. The Left were much annoyed to find that they were going to 'share' the 14th of July with the Fascists; but decided that the best thing to do in the circumstances was to outnumber them hopelessly.

. . . . . .

At last the great day came. Some of the London papers were full of panic stories of how a civil war might break out in Paris that day. They were to be disappointed. It was a sunny day and it lent cheerfulness to everything – to the military parade in the morning, with the 600 aeroplanes flying over Paris, to the anti-Fascist procession in the afternoon, and even to the Croix de Feu display later in the evening.

All the police did was to separate East from West, and to see that neither procession transgressed the limit fixed for them. And everything went off perfectly smoothly. The Bastille–Nation procession of the Left was the most impressive thing of its kind ever seen in Paris. Some 300,000 to 400,000 people took part in it. The police were absent, and everything was organised by the Front Populaire stewards themselves. Although at the start they got into a jam – possibly because some of the processions began to crowd too rapidly from the converging avenues into the Bastille – their way of acting the traffic policeman was highly creditable.

The anti-Fascist procession took place in a holiday mood. But so vast was this procession that it gave people the feeling that Fascism in France was not for to-morrow. The slogans on the banners were confined to anti-Fascism, and were not directed against militarism or even capitalism – except for a few references to the 'financial bastilles' that would soon be captured.

'Les Soviets partout! Les Soviets partout!'

The procession was mostly Socialist and Communist; and the Radicals were not in great evidence. Still, it was a beginning. M. Daladier was warmly cheered; and so were M. Pierre Cot and M. Guernut, perched on the roof of a taxi and displaying a large tricolour flag. The union between radicalism and the United Front was effectively symbolised by the two cars – which drove down the Faubourg St. Antoine side by side – the old Faubourg St. Antoine of 1789 – one car flying a red, and the other – M. Cot's – a tricolour flag. Paul Faure and young Maurice Thorez sat on top of the car with the red flag. *'Les Soviets partout! Les Soviets partout!'* the demonstrators shouted and the crowd, as usual, sang the Internationale. Cries to the effect that Colonel de la Rocque and M. Chiappe should be shot, were very popular. Nobody sang the Marseillaise; and the tricolour flags were few and far between – the Communists had not adopted them yet. Still, it was a beginning.

Later, at the opposite end of the town, the Croix de Feu, led by Colonel de la Rocque, who looked terribly solemn, paraded up the Champs-Élysées and lighted the flame on the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. There were some 30,000 of them in the procession. First came the older men with their War medals; and then the Volontaires Nationaux. A crowd of about 50,000, largely composed of young women in pretty summer frocks, lined the pavements, cheering frantically – *'Vive La Rocque! Vive La Rocque! La France aux Français!'* Numerically, it was insignificant, compared with the vast Bastille procession; but the military discipline of La Rocque's men was impressive. The 14th of July 1935 marked not only the beginning of the Front Populaire; it was also the apotheosis of the Croix de Feu. At no moment had La Rocque's prestige stood higher. The Left knew it; and were determined not to allow his prestige to grow any bigger.

In the evening, without distinction of party, Paris returned to its usual July 14th amusements. And when, at the café corners, the couples danced around the improvised bands and gramophones, it was not very different from René Clair's idyllic *Quatorze Juillet*. And the fireworks from the Seine were a great success. But it was an historical day for all that.

. . . . . .

On July 18 there were the protest demonstrations of the government servants against the Laval decrees; and early in August there were the more serious disturbances at Brest and Toulon. But they were purely local and did not spread. During August and the greater part of September France was on holiday. Laval alone was very active; – for the Italo-Abyssinian conflict was slowly but surely coming to a head.

CHAPTER XI

FRANCE AND ABYSSINIA

I DO not propose to explore the jungle of the diplomatic conversations in Rome, Paris and Geneva during the summer and autumn of 1935. We know now how it all ended; and it scarcely matters any more to-day what exactly was proposed to Mussolini by the Committee of Five or the Committee of Thirteen, in the hope that his transportation of hundreds of thousands of soldiers and Blackshirts and of innumerable aeroplanes and tanks to Eritrea and Somaliland would finally turn out to be nothing but a colossal bluff.

But what still matters is the part played by France in that lamentable affair, which was to become a disaster not only to Abyssinia but also to Europe and the League. What were the reactions of French opinion to the Abyssinian conflict? How great was the share of Laval's responsibility for what happened? What was it that determined his singular behaviour, so inconsistent with France's traditional 'League Policy'? And who was responsible for the famous Hoare–Laval Plan?

As we have seen, Laval believed at first in collective security – of sorts. There was the London agreement, there was Stresa, with its decision to hold, shortly afterwards, a Danubian Conference in Rome. There were his journey to Moscow, and the Franco-Soviet Pact, and his journey to Warsaw, and his presence in Cracow at Pilsudski's funeral, in the course of which he had a long conversation with Goering, whom he tried to convince that Germany ought to enter into the 'peace system'. But he did not believe in the possibility of Germany's encirclement (Barthou's idea of collective security); nor did he seriously believe that Germany had any intention of joining the 'system'. He was, altogether, rather sceptical about it. Nor did he have much faith in the Little Entente which struck him, as he looked at the map of Europe, as being a 'powder' of little states – quite unreliable. Italy was more substantial – infinitely more substantial. He said to himself that if only

he could get Italy in on France's side, Germany and England and everybody would be impressed, and France's strength and prestige would be immensely increased, and Germany would not dare to attack her. In time, he came to the conclusion, that even if Germany refused to keep quiet, she might perhaps be allowed a 'limited' outlet for her energies in the East. Time would show. But a Franco-Italian alliance would, at any rate, put off a major war for a good long time. As for England, she would inevitably be on France's side in case of German aggression. Only in a military sense, Laval thought, England did not amount to much, and the Italian alliance was, therefore, of much more immediate value.

Mussolini had Laval, as well as M. de Chambrun, the French Ambassador in Rome, in his pocket from the start. He gratefully accepted the 'deserts' Laval presented to Italy in January; and held out the promise of a regular Franco-Italian alliance. Laval returned from Rome feeling a great statesman.

The shipment of Italian soldiers to Eritrea was in full progress when the Stresa Conference met; but it was an unpleasant subject, and if the British thought it 'irrelevant' to mention, how much more 'irrelevant' must it have been to Laval?

To salve his conscience in relation to the Little Entente Laval proposed that a Danubian Conference be shortly held; and Mussolini assented; – but, naturally, the conference never took place. Laval did not really mind; for he was interested only in the independence of Austria, and by that time Mussolini had given him full assurances that if only France and Italy hung well together, the matter would be well looked after.

The Gamelin–Badoglio agreement which, in May, enabled France and Italy to withdraw troops from their Alpine frontier, so that France might concentrate hers on the Rhine, and Italy hers on the Brenner convinced Laval still further of the soundness of his policy – even if, in reality, many of the Italians were to be sent, not to the Brenner but to Abyssinia.[1]

[1] What also contributed to the pro-Italian sentiment of Paris during the summer of 1935 was, in addition to the pro-Italian propaganda in the Press, the magnificent exhibition of Italian art at the Petit Palais. Mussolini had personally instructed the Italian galleries to send to Paris the greatest masterpieces of Italian art. Michelangelo and Leonardo proved good Fascist and anti-Negus propagandists on that occasion.

At the beginning of June, Laval still took a philosophic view of Abyssinia. It was about that time that the British Government suddenly woke up, having for months treated the matter as 'irrelevant'. It decided that Mussolini must not be allowed to annex Abyssinia, or to turn her into an Italian protectorate. M. Laval, who had noticed the complete indifference towards Abyssinia displayed by the British Ministers at Stresa – Mr. Eden, it should be remembered, was not among them – was unpleasantly surprised.

No sooner was the meeting of the League Council over, at which Mr. Eden first voiced the anti-Italian policy of the British Government, than the Italians began their long process of intimidating the French. Reports were published in the French Press that Herr von Hassel, the German Ambassador in Rome, had just proposed to the Duce a compromise on Austria. No *Anschluss* would be attempted even if a Nazi Government was established in Vienna. Mussolini, it was reported, was favourably impressed with this offer; which, once accepted, would leave him free to turn his back on Europe and concentrate on Abyssinia.

'We have travelled a long distance from Stresa,' the *Manchester Guardian* wrote on June 11, 'where the Italians urged the French to render them military assistance in the event of a Nazi *putsch* in Austria. The French – and especially those who had great illusions about Italy's solid friendship – are greatly perturbed by these latest developments, and are not sure whether they should support England's firm opposition to any Italian attempt to conquer Abyssinia – or whether they should yield to Italy's threat of coming to terms with Germany, of abandoning the League of Nations, and of breaking up the Franco-Italian Entente and the Stresa Front.'

For M. Laval and many Frenchmen still believed that an attack on Abyssinia was, somehow, compatible with Italy's continued membership of the League, with her loyalty to the 'collective system' and even with the Stresa Front. And the purpose of Mussolini's alleged *rapprochement* with Germany was precisely to discourage the French from following Mr. Eden.

And then, a few days later, there happened something which played into the hands of the pro-Italian elements in France.

It was the sudden conclusion of the Anglo-German naval agreement. Apart from being an 'act of disloyalty' and incompatible with the Anglo-French declaration of February 3, it was interpreted by not only the pro-Italians in France, but by everybody in France as a blow to the League policy of collective security and 'indivisible peace'.

'The letters exchanged in London yesterday,' Pertinax wrote on June 19, 'are extremely encouraging to Hitler. He has triumphed over the principle of "indivisible peace" proclaimed by the French and British Governments in the past.'

The pro-League elements in France were extremely perturbed by the naval agreement, and by the manner in which it was concluded. But the pro-Italian elements were triumphant. Their first reaction to the Anglo-German agreement was highly significant. The *Echo de Paris*, the *Intransigeant* and some of the other papers suggested a subtle form of revenge on England. They said that in view of England's 'betrayal of League principles', there was no longer any reason why France should in future oppose Italy's ambitions in Abyssinia in the name of these League principles which were so grossly ignored by England when it suited her.

Was it a coincidence that, on the day after the Anglo-German agreement Laval should have expressed the opinion before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber that war in Abyssinia 'was inevitable'?

Apart from that, Laval perhaps also had a suspicion that he had been duped by the Anglo-German naval agreement. He had always dreamed of a Franco-German military understanding. One of his intimate friends told me that day: 'We have been duped by England. If she had not talked so much about "international co-operation" in the last few months, France might have got in first with a direct military agreement with Germany. Now that the Germans have got from England what they want, they will not bother. I am afraid we have missed the boat.'

A few days later, on June 21, Mr. Eden left for Rome. He stopped in Paris and had a long talk with Laval, whom he tried to convince that the naval agreement, though concluded in a somewhat unorthodox manner, was calculated to become an important element in the general system of security. Laval

was not reassured, and felt obliged to repeat the 'reservations' – that is, the protest – of the French Government.

A few days later, Mr. Eden returned to Paris, feeling none too pleased with the reception he had been given by Mussolini. He told Laval that Mussolini had been 'completely unhelpful'; and, returning to London he declared that 'the whole thing was still on the knees of the gods'. In Paris nothing more was said about the naval agreement except that Laval told Mr. Eden that armaments and pacts should in future be treated 'interdependently'.

But, for a time, all these problems were relegated to the background. What mattered now was Abyssinia. French opinion suddenly found itself in the unpleasant dilemma of 'choosing between England and Italy'. During the three following months while new attempts at conciliation and the discussion of sanctions were in progress, the battle in France grew in intensity. In the meantime Laval 'refused to choose between England and Italy'. There is not the slightest doubt that a large part of the French Press was paid by Italy. In well-informed diplomatic quarters in Paris, where a great deal is known about such things, it was estimated that Italy had spent about sixty million francs on pro-Italian propaganda in the French Press during the second half of 1935. It was a good investment. Laval looked on encouragingly and complacently.

Abyssinian barbarism and savagery were one of the stock themes; the greatness of Mussolini was another, the terror of throwing Italy into the arms of Germany was a third; but the most popular theme of all was the duplicity and hypocrisy of England. Lake Tsana and the Blue Nile and the Sudan, and hegemony in the Mediterranean – these, we were told, were the things that mattered to England, and not League principles, which she had consistently ignored – as was only too apparent (to take the most recent example) from the Anglo-German naval agreement.

The Rickett episode on September 1 was welcomed with a howl of joy in the pro-Italian Press; he was represented as being the agent of the British Government, or at least of *la Cité* – the City of London – which has decided to buy up Abyssinia before Italy had got her finger in; the papers called

him 'the Financial Colonel Lawrence'. The voices of sanity were few and far between. In the Right-Wing Press Pertinax of the *Echo de Paris* (where his views clashed horribly with De Kerillis's Mussolini-worship on another page of the paper), and M. d'Ormesson of the *Figaro* were mere voices calling in the wilderness.

> 'We have a great desire to help Italy,' Pertinax wrote on July 23, 'but we cannot ignore the most recent international agreements and expose them to the hostility of British and American opinion. We must also consider our friends and allies, whose chief concern in this Italian-Abyssinian dispute is to prevent any precedent to which Germany might later refer to justify an aggression. If the League Covenant is put aside too obviously, then England might lose all interest in what is called collective security, leave Geneva and adopt in future the methods of the Anglo-German naval agreement.'

But even Pertinax, and, with him, Mme Tabouis in the *Œuvre* suggested that appearances might yet be saved if Article Fifteen, paragraph seven of the Covenant were applied to the Abyssinian dispute. Mme Tabouis – who was more explicit than Pertinax – wrote on July 23:

> 'the Great Powers might obviously arrange things in such a way that there would be no unanimous vote on the resolution submitted to the Council. The League would thus give Italy a legal basis for starting a war, and enable her to remain a member of the League, and thus leave intact the international order built up on the basis of the League Covenant.'

This extraordinary procedure was suggested without any visible touch of irony. Only when, a few days later, Mme Tabouis went to Geneva, she discovered that the Small Powers were up in arms against Italy, and would not consider any such bright suggestion. But the suggestion just shows that even writers of the Left in France were by no means anxious to quarrel with Italy. It should, however, be added that in July, when that extraordinary proposal was made, Britain's attitude was still highly equivocal.

French official spokesmen, in the meantime, thought it monstrous that European security should be wrecked for the sake of Abyssinia; they urged a gentle handling of Mussolini, and claimed that he was simply 'bluffing', and that he had no intention of starting any war in Abyssinia. The Left were per-

plexed, and found it difficult to uphold the pro-British case so soon after the naval agreement.

On the whole, it may be said that the situation continued to remain obscure during July and August. France was obviously unwilling to quarrel with Italy and continued to hope that the trouble might yet be settled. After all, the French said to themselves, Mussolini has not left the League, and is obviously not anxious to burn all his bridges. It is true that the Paris Conference in August yielded no result – but there was still hope. 'Perhaps he is still bluffing, and bargaining for a better price', official spokesmen whispered.

The turning-point came in September with Sir Samuel Hoare's speech on the 11th and the dispatch of the Home Fleet into the Mediterranean a few days later. France had now clearly to take a decision – for Britain and the League, or for Italy.

> 'The recent response of public opinion,' Sir Samuel Hoare said, 'shows how completely the nation supports the government in the full acceptance of League membership. To suggest or insinuate that this policy is for some reason peculiar to the present question at issue would be a complete misunderstanding. It is to the principles of the League, and not to any particular manifestation, that the British nation has demonstrated its adherence. Any other view is at once an underestimate of our good faith and an imputation upon our sincerity. In conformity with its precise and explicit obligations, the League stands, and my country stands with it, for the collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety, and particularly for steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression. The attitude of the British nation in the last few weeks has clearly demonstrated the fact that this is no variable and unreliable sentiment, but a principle of international conduct to which they and their government hold with firm, enduring and universal persistence. There, then, is the British attitude towards the Covenant. I cannot believe that it will be changed so long as the League remains an effective body, and the main bridge between the United Kingdom and the Continent remains intact.'

The speech marked, as even so severe a critic as 'Vigilantes' admitted, 'a reversal of the British policy pursued in the four previous years'. It created a sensation at Geneva, and Laval, and all the other delegates hastened to reaffirm their loyalty to the League. In France, Sir Samuel Hoare's speech appeared

to facilitate the task of the Left, who had always been sincere supporters of a League policy. True, Sir Samuel's speech was not devoid of loopholes. Its most important phrase – 'collective resistance against unprovoked aggression' – contained two somewhat elastic adjectives; but, even so, it was important to take Britain at her word. The long-sought-for opportunity, the French Left said, must not be missed. The French Press of the Right was rather embarrassed by Sir Samuel's speech. It naturally picked holes in it; but it could not deny that Britain had never taken such a strong stand for the League before.

But four days later the Home Fleet was sent into the Mediterranean. At once the pro-Italian elements in France, who had been stunned by Hoare's speech, recovered their energies; and raised a loud outcry that the British Government was trying to drag France into a war. In spite of the Hoare speech, the earlier campaign against Britain's 'imperialistic interests' and her 'duplicity' immediately doubled in intensity. 'Will you fight for the Negus?' the papers asked; and the *Action Française* referred invariably to Mr. Eden as *'le sanguinaire'*. Rapturous articles on Mussolini and interviews with the Duce became more and more numerous; and M. Gentizon, the Rome correspondent of the *Temps*, wrote from Eritrea:

> 'To the Ascari, Italy is the greatest country in the world, and the most powerful nation in the world. And their only and real Negus is Victor Emmanuel III. They love Italy deeply and sincerely.'

He was also careful to emphasise that in no circumstances could the neutrality of the Suez Canal be violated. And the *Intransigeant* contrasted 'the hysterics of England' with the 'quiet dignity of Italy'.

When on October 3 the war actually broke out, and the question of sanctions arose things went from bad to worse. The Fascist *Solidarité Française* wrote *'M—— pour l'Angleterre'*; and on October 11, Henri Béraud wrote in *Gringoire* an article which even created a diplomatic incident, for Sir George Clerk, the British Ambassador, found it necessary to lodge a protest against it at the Quai d'Orsay. It scarcely deserved that honour – it was full of the old nonsense about the Intelligence Service; it contained a 'rigorously authentic'

account of the conversation in Berlin between Sir John Simon and Hitler on June 18, the anniversary of Waterloo (Sir John was by that time Home Secretary and was certainly not in Berlin that day); and it said: 'In France only hall-porters and M. Flandin are pro-British.' And, after dismissing England's dead in the last war as a mere trifle, compared with the Hundred Years' War, it concluded with the words:

> 'I hate England in my own name and in the name of my ancestors. I hate her by instinct and by tradition. I say, and I repeat that England must be reduced to slavery.... The day will come when the world will have the strength and the wisdom to enslave the tyrant with his reputation for invincibility. Concord between the continental nations alone can save Europe and the world. Who knows? Perhaps the day is near.'

It was the case of a Fascist mentality gone wild. And not even an honest Fascist mentality. M. Béraud, who now licked Mussolini's boots, had been a 'proud democrat' only a few years earlier; and his highly critical articles on Italy had caused the *Petit Parisien* to be prohibited in that country. M. Béraud afterwards claimed that his absurd article 'had saved France from being dragged into war against Italy'.[1] Actually on the day of its publication I heard two Croix de Feu men discuss the article in a café. '*Il va tout de même un peu fort,*' one of them said, and the other agreed. Still, this pro-Italian campaign in the majority of the French Press carried weight. The Left were pro-British and pro-League; but, as one of them frankly admitted: 'What can we do when we've got the whole damned Press against us?' I shall deal later with the Left reactions to the Abyssinian conflict.

As already said, the Home Fleet entered the Mediterranean on the 15th. A few days earlier at Geneva, Laval had been approached by the British Government, who wished to know whether France would be 'with them' in the event of an armed conflict with Italy. It was at this point, according to Pertinax, that Laval missed the greatest chance in his career. For, at that moment, on the eve of Sir Samuel Hoare's speech, Laval could have obtained certain British assurances concerning German aggression which he would not have obtained on any

[1] A more recent example of Béraud at his foulest was his slanderous campaign in *Gringoire* against Salengro, which drove the latter to suicide.

other occasion. But he was so concerned about Italy, that he would commit himself to nothing, and let the great opportunity slip past.

When the Home Fleet entered the Mediterranean, he pointed out (rightly, one may add) that the League Council had not asked the British Government to do so; but his subsequent display of bad humour was less justifiable, and did not make matters any easier. When the war broke out, he very reluctantly agreed to sanctions. As for Franco-British naval co-operation in the Mediterranean, he formally agreed to it after long-drawn-out negotiations, and the exchange of several very sour notes, on October 26; – but this time without receiving anything in return.

Sanctions – rather harmless financial and economic sanctions were agreed upon at Geneva on October 19. A few weeks later, the British Government, which had fought so gallantly for the League, scored its great election victory. And then came the climb-down.

Laval, though surrendering in the end to the demand for economic sanctions, after duly inquiring how far in that direction Mussolini would really allow him to go, is no doubt the principal villain of the piece, and the chief wrecker of the League.

British opinion, largely reflected in the Peace Ballot, was definitely 'pro-League' during 1935, as can be witnessed from the explosion that followed the Hoare–Laval Plan. But how far was the British Government really prepared to go, even on that occasion, towards turning the League into a powerful instrument of international security against aggression?

There are strong grounds for saying that the British Government, aware of the sentiment existing in the country, did not dare take any line other than a 'League line' during the weeks preceding the General Election. And while it was fighting 'the battle of the League' it continued to suggest through the Press that if sanctions were to prove a failure, it would be France's fault; and, that but for Laval's resistance, Britain would have gone to almost any length (whatever 'almost' meant) to enforce sanctions, strengthen the League, and safeguard Peace for years to come.

There is the French note of October 18, hitherto unpub-

lished, which shows fairly conclusively that Sir Samuel Hoare's determination to make the League triumph was not very grim even in September. In this note M. Laval bitterly complained that the British Government were representing France in the eyes of their own people as being the great culprit who was preventing the League from working miracles. He recalled that on September 9, Sir Samuel Hoare had *spontaneously* informed him that *in no circumstances* would the British Government apply to Italy any sanctions other than financial and economic sanctions; *and that such measures as a naval blockade of Italy or the closing of the Suez Canal were out of the question.*

As far as I know, Laval's statement was never contradicted by the British Government. Sir Samuel Hoare's conduct after the election clearly showed indeed that his 'battle for the League' had been largely a put-up show. He showed no enthusiasm for the oil embargo; and this lack of enthusiasm discouraged the United States from taking any share in the action against the aggressor. When, in the middle of November, Laval was invited to go to Geneva to discuss the oil embargo, and said (quite reasonably) that he had to speak at the Chamber that day, the British Government was perfectly content not to fix any other date in the immediate future to suit M. Laval's convenience. It should, indeed, be remembered that the elaboration of the Hoare–Laval Plan was already then in full progress between M. Peterson and M. de Saint-Quentin.

The Hoare–Laval Plan was formally agreed upon between its two signatories on Sunday, December 8. Sir Samuel Hoare had arrived in Paris on the Saturday, and it was afterwards alleged on the British side that his battle with Laval had been a very stiff one. Actually there was no battle at all. The plan had been virtually agreed upon between the Quai d'Orsay and the Foreign Office several days in advance; and it was not until four o'clock on Sunday that Hoare and Laval began to examine the plan and add a few touches here and there. When Sir Samuel left for Paris on that Saturday, he must have known exactly what the position was (he probably had a draft of the plan in his pocket). For it is well to remember that for several days in advance the diplomatic correspondents of nearly all

the leading English papers had published (with minor variations) summaries of the Hoare–Laval Plan. The 'dope' had been handed out to them in handfuls by the Foreign Office, which was trying to 'prepare' public opinion for the shock. A few days after the publication of the Hoare–Laval Plan, a prominent newspaper in England reprinted a message from its diplomatic correspondent published in the paper during the previous week, with the proud headline – 'Our Diplomatic Correspondent's Forecast'. And where could the 'Diplomatic Correspondent' have got his story – except at the Foreign Office? So, it is clear that the Hoare–Laval Plan was ready before Hoare had left London; and that he was not 'bamboozled' by 'that trickster', as was afterwards suggested in certain British quarters.[1]

There are many who, looking back on it, now say that the Hoare–Laval Plan was, after all, much better than what has since happened to Abyssinia. True. Only, was it not against the contradiction between the British Government's attitude before, and its attitude after the election that the British public rebelled, rather than against the plan itself? Had Sir Samuel Hoare not sounded so virtuous before the election; had he declared *then* that something like this plan was the only solution, British opinion might not have reacted so sharply.

But in that case the Baldwin Government might not have won the election. The British public simply felt that the election had been fought on false pretences.

In comparison, Laval must for once have felt a relatively straightforward man. But, for all that, the Hoare–Laval Plan brought down his government as well – though not at once.

[1] The main difference between the forecasts and the Plan was in the Western longitude of the 'colonisation' territory; under the Plan Italy received even more than had been predicted: but the principle was the same. The exact terms of the Plan – i.e. no longer 'forecasts' – were revealed by Pertinax and Mme Tabouis on December 9. Hoare had declared the matter to be 'terribly delicate for the next forty-eight hours' (did he expect Mussolini to accept the Plan before the row could start in England?) and had extracted from the British journalists in Paris the promise 'not to make any conjectures'. As a result, they foolishly feigned ignorance in their Monday's papers, as did, indeed, also most of the French papers, at Laval's request. Pertinax's indiscretion infuriated Laval and greatly embarrassed Baldwin.

CHAPTER XII

THE FALL OF LAVAL

Un anglais ne sachant que faire, s'en va à Rome, il rencontre le Prince Charles-Edouard chez un cardinal; il en est fort content. De retour chez lui, il boit dans un cabaret à la santé du Prince Charles-Edouard. Le voilà accusé sa haute trahison. Mais qu'a-t-il trahi hautement lorsqu'il a dit, en buvant, qu'il souhaitait que ce prince se portât bien?

– VOLTAIRE. *Diction. Phil.*

1. THE FASCIST 'MARCH ON PARIS'

THE Laval Government took a long time to die. Three times in a month the Chamber nearly overthrew it; and three times Laval came through with flying colours – though, after the third battle, rather the worse for wear and tear. It was not until three weeks later – in the middle of January – that the Laval Government was broken up by the Radicals from within.

The Chamber had many grievances against him; but it could not help admiring the little man's genius for manœuvring. The short session of November–December 1935 was one of the most exciting in French Parliamentary history – and it was Laval who made it exciting. He produced the rabbits out of his hat with the unperturbed air of a professional conjurer. The three grievances, over which the three battles were fought, were Laval's financial policy; his attitude to the Fascist Leagues; and, lastly, his Abyssinian Policy. It was over this that he ultimately came to grief.

It would, however, be no exaggeration to say that during the two months preceding the reassembly of Parliament, Left opinion in France was up in arms against Laval less on account of his Abyssinian policy than on account of his failure to deal effectively with the Croix de Feu and the other Leagues, who during these two months – September and October – seemed to have become a more immediate menace to the Republic than ever before.

We have seen how, before Parliament rose in June, Laval assured the Left with his hand on his heart 'that he owed everything to the Republic', and that he would not tolerate any more 'lightning rallies' and 'mobilisation exercises' from the Croix de Feu. From the middle of July to the middle of September little was heard of the Croix de Feu. Like all respectable French bourgeois, they were bathing in the sea, or climbing mountains, or living the château life; and it seemed that Colonel de la Rocque was keeping the promise he had made to Laval not to be troublesome. But suddenly, on September 23, the Croix de Feu made a spectacular *rentrée*.

But before we come to this, it should be explained that the Croix de Feu were not the only serious 'Fascist menace' during those months. About the middle of 1935 a new Fascist movement had come into sudden prominence. This was the so-called 'Front Paysan', led by a man of the name of Dorgères. In the summer of 1935 the agricultural slump was at its worst in France, and Dorgères tried to exploit the discontent for his own ends. He was a fiery demagogue, who did not hesitate to preach to the peasants the non-payment of taxes, and who conjured up visions of how he and his Greenshirts would one day march on the Chamber of Deputies and 'shoot down the whole damned lot'. Not that this prevented him in April 1935 from standing for Parliament in the Blois by-election (a constituency left vacant by M. Chautemps's election to the Senate); and in that Radical stronghold Dorgères failed by only a very narrow margin to be returned. He wrote a book called *'Haut les Fourches'* ('Up with your Pitchforks') in which he argued that owing to 'the free-trade doctrines of all the French Governments since the Second Empire', French agriculture had been consistently sacrificed to French industry; (in reality, of course, the very opposite is true; the protection given to French agriculture has always been a handicap to French industry). The Left-Wing Press claimed – though wrongly, I believe – that Dorgères's real name was the Vicomte d'Halluin, and also proceeded to show up his close association with the big landowners of Brittany and Normandy, adding that what this nobleman was trying to foster was not a *jacquerie* at all; but a *chouan* rebellion. His alleged association with the landed nobility did much to discredit him in the eyes of his sup-

porters; and the rise in agricultural prices, which began in the autumn of 1935, also helped to restore loyalty to the Republic among those whom Dorgères had, for a short time, led astray. Another blow to Dorgères was the decision taken by the Agrarian Party, of which the 'Peasant Front' was an emanation, to dissociate itself from Dorgères's violent methods. On October 3, they published a *communiqué* in which they denied that the Agrarian Party had ever advocated the non-payment of taxes. The *communiqué* was an implicit repudiation of Dorgères. Soon afterwards the Agrarian Party split, and it was not until a year later that Dorgères made another brief reappearance among the market gardeners – the *maraîchers* – in the immediate neighbourhood of Paris.

But in September, Dorgères was still very troublesome. About September 15 he called upon the peasants not to pay their taxes, but to send their tax papers to the Front Paysan offices in Paris, 'which would deal with them' – whatever that meant. The matter became so serious that a large part of the Cabinet Meeting of September 17 had to be devoted to it, and M. Régnier, the Minister of Finance, threatened to take drastic action against this agitation. However, the 'disobedience' campaign soon fizzled out (even Charles Maurras, the Royalist leader, otherwise sympathetic to Dorgères, had warned him that this campaign was an absurd one, and would lead to nothing), and in October little more was heard of Dorgères. But instead a great deal was heard of the Croix de Feu.

It began, as already said, with their spectacular *rentrée* on September 23. This took the form of 'motorised' mobilisations in several towns of France. Thus, 20,000 Croix de Feu men – mostly from Paris – assembled that day at Meaux alone. They drove there, according to the *Populaire*, by cars in 'caravan formation', with an escort of motor-cyclists, with a Leader in the first car, and with two cars, with *dispos* in them, at the tail of a 'caravan'. 'Seven hundred Croix de Feu cars drove that day through Bondy alone,' the *Populaire* wrote. The official purpose of the Meaux Rally was to commemorate the anniversary of the battle of the Marne. But Meaux was not the only rallying-point. Similar rallies took place on the same day in several other towns of France. Everywhere the speakers

treated the Front Populaire as 'Enemy No. 1'; and at Marseilles M. Arnault, the local Croix de Feu leader, declared: 'I have been instructed by our chief, Colonel de la Rocque, to explain his intentions. We inform the country that we shall not tolerate a Front Commun Government of Daladier and Frot taking office – which will be the ruin and the downfall of France. We are ready to use force if a Government of Disorder attempts to take office.' And another speaker is alleged to have declared that the Croix de Feu would resort to direct action the moment the Laval Government was overthrown.

The Left-Wing Press alleged that these rallies had not taken place without the knowledge of Laval.

On the following day, September 24, M. Chéron was grossly insulted at the railway-station at Caën by a Croix de Feu man.

The Croix de Feu had numerous patrons among wealthy landed proprietors; and it was usually on some 'private' estate that the rallies were held – which, in the eyes of the Croix de Feu leaders, rendered them perfectly legal. Nevertheless, the Left considered them a provocation; especially when they were held in or near some 'proletarian' centre. Considering that they were being provoked, the Left decided to organise 'counter-demonstrations' whenever such a rally took place. This inevitably led to serious trouble. On October 6, a thousand Croix de Feu men assembled on a large farm at Villepinte near Paris. While they were there, a crowd of several hundred Socialists and Communists led by the Maire of Villepinte in person, with the tricolour ribbon across his chest, assembled outside the farm, protesting vociferously against the rally. Some blows were exchanged, and a few shots were fired, and the *garde mobile* had to be called out to restore order. The Maire of Villepinte who was largely responsible for the trouble, was thereupon suspended from his duties by the Minister of the Interior; – which, naturally, annoyed the Left Press, which said that the Laval Government was taking sides with the Fascists. A similar brawl resulted a few days later from a Croix de Feu meeting in a large café at Brunoy, and an anti-Fascist counter-demonstration outside.

Perhaps all this Croix de Feu agitation was in reality less serious than it looked. M. Paul Chopine, a former Croix de Feu man, who had been closely associated with La Rocque,

but had become disappointed in the movement, assured the *Populaire* that it should not be taken too seriously. 'Of course they hold meetings at châteaux,' he said. 'There is nothing surprising in that. They are mostly young fellows of the bourgeoisie, the aristocracy and the big business class; and since most of them have private cars, they readily take part in these rallies – especially when the weather is fine. As for La Rocque's threats, he has to let off steam to keep his chaps quiet, and make them feel important.'

There was some truth in this; but the Press of the Left nevertheless continued for two months a most alarming campaign about the Fascist menace. On October 16, the *Œuvre* said that La Rocque had announced a *coup de force* in Paris which would take place within the next few days, and would begin with the occupation of the central telephone and telegraph stations. 'Thursday has been mentioned as the day. La Rocque has been boasting of "having seen Cabinet Ministers" and of having left them "much more impressed" by the visit than he was.'

The same paper published a speculative account of how, on the day before the *putsch*, the Croix de Feu army would be concentrated in about a hundred villas, on the outskirts of the Bois de Boulogne, belonging to Croix de Feu sympathisers. Would the coup, it asked a few days later, be attempted on the eve of the Radical Congress? And the Socialist *Populaire* wrote on October 9:

> 'The army of the Trusts, the army of Civil war, is ready for action. This will take place before the General Election, which they fear. The 35,000 men mobilised last Sunday at Lizy-sur-Ourcq represent exactly the effectives that will be concentrated in Paris. On the day of the Paris *putsch* the larger provincial towns, most of them favourable to the Left, will be occupied.'

And two days later it wrote:

> 'The Croix de Feu are the most powerful Civil war army that has ever existed in France. La Rocque dares to accuse the Front Populaire of preparing Civil war. Like Hitler, like Mussolini, he is trying to justify in advance his "counter-attack", which he will launch when he is ready. La Rocque says that the decisive hour will strike when the Laval Government falls, or, at the latest, when its successor falls.'

On the night of October 12 the *Solidarité Française* called a protest meeting against sanctions in the Place de l'Opéra. The other elements of the Front National having decided at the last moment not to join in, the meeting was a failure. Nevertheless, the police had to take serious precautions, and two hundred *gardes mobiles* were stationed that night outside the British Embassy in the Faubourg St. Honoré, in anticipation of a possible demonstration against Great Britain and against *Eden le Sanguinaire*.

What had been all along the attitude of the Left in France? The truth is that the majority of the Left were not keen on a strong sanctions policy against Italy.

On September 3, five simultaneous meetings were held in Paris, at which Mr. Norman Angell, Mr. Philip Noel Baker, M. Jouhaux, and other League supporters spoke, and the British Labour Party and the French Socialist Party agreed that day to start a 'powerful campaign for Peace and the League and the application of Article Sixteen'. Laval was severely attacked in the Socialist Press: 'By declaring in advance one's intention to oppose sanctions,' Paul Faure wrote on September 4, 'one only encourages aggression. Laval, with his "mediation" and "conciliation" is not rendering the League a service. If Britain, France and the Soviet Union were in agreement, they would soon enforce peace.'

But in the matter of military sanctions the French Socialists were rather more reserved than their British brethren.

'To prevent Italian aggression,' Blum wrote on September 8, 'it is not necessary to make war on Italy. Of all the great powers Italy is the most vulnerable to economic sanctions.'

He was overjoyed by Sir Samuel Hoare's speech of September 11, and noted 'an irresistible movement of opinion at Geneva which may change the face of the world'. But, a few days later, when British battleships had been sent into the Mediterranean, his tone changed. In an article called 'England's Fault', he wrote that the Admiralty had got out of hand; 'it is playing into the hands of the pro-Mussolini Press by suggesting that sanctions are inevitably military. *I notice in the last two days that French opinion is in a state of great bewilderment.*' What he meant was that Left-Wing opinion was in a state of bewilderment. On September 20, the Com-

mittee of the Front Populaire passed a resolution in which it criticised Laval, but took rather an ambiguous attitude towards sanctions. Although it spoke of 'observing the whole Covenant', it said that the Front Populaire,

> 'which is passionately attached to Peace, rejects with horror the idea of a conflict with Italy or any other country, and is uncompromisingly opposed to any application of armed force.'

When the war actually broke out, Blum no longer maintained that economic sanctions would be sufficient. 'For the present,' he wrote on October 7, 'the question of economic sanctions alone has arisen.' But, on the following day he already wrote – 'Eventually, however, Peace may require the application of armed force. A defensive war is just as atrocious as a war of aggression; but it is still better than if the world made a cowardly surrender to wars of aggression.' The 'tragic dilemma', he said, would have been avoided if only the world had disarmed.

His article, somehow, lacked conviction. As for the rank and file, they were even less keen on going to war for the League. I remember a Radical throwing up his arms in despair over the state of French opinion: 'What can we do,' he exclaimed, 'with the whole Press against us?' No doubt, the majority of the people wanted the League to save its face (for it would still be useful on other occasions); but there was not much enthusiasm for 'dangerous' economic sanctions, still less for military sanctions. I also remember André Malraux, the novelist, speaking in favour of sanctions (he did not specify which) at a meeting organised by a group of leading Left-Wing intellectuals. The audience was very 'Left'; but after his speech he complained to me how the mention of sanctions 'had failed to arouse any favourable response in the audience'.

It is true that the Communists started a campaign in favour of closing the Suez Canal; but they did not keep it up – possibly through lack of wide support.

At the Radical Congress, Herriot made a long and heartfelt speech about the League and Anglo-French co-operation, and about the necessity of applying the Covenant. 'For years we have advocated a League Policy,' he said. 'At last England has come round to the French point of view. Is this the time for France to change her mind?' For all that, M. Pierre Cot,

one of the few men in France who were prepared to go the whole length of military sanctions, was specially asked by M. Herriot not to make a speech at the Congress.

3. LA JOURNÉE DE LAMOURETTE – THE CROIX DE FEU 'GO TORY'

That Memorable Chamber Session of the end of 1935 did not begin until the 28th of November. It was surprising, M. Blum said that day, that M. Laval should have found it at all necessary to ask for the confidence of Parliament.

'I suppose that if you could have passed the Budget without consulting Parliament –'

'I should have done it!' Laval snapped back.

'A very grave remark!' M. Blum said.

Laval was becoming more and more suspect to the Left. M. Tardieu had recently recalled a remark that Laval had once made: 'Parliament can function only in normal times'; and he was also known to be on friendly terms with the Croix de Feu, whom he regarded as good human material for a new 'anti-capitalist' party.

The Chamber was greatly preoccupied by the 'Fascist Menace', and it had a trump card against those who claimed that the Fascist menace was not real.

On Armistice Day in Paris, owing to an inexplicable blunder – or was it calculated provocation? – it so happened that a vast procession of Left-Wing ex-servicemen and their political sympathisers that was moving up the Champs-Élysées that afternoon, was made to coincide with a parade of the Solidarité Française in their blue shirts, the Jeunesses Patriotes, the Royalists carrying heavy canes, and a procession of 'Royalist ladies'; – though it had been clearly understood that the day would be 'reserved' for ex-soldiers only. (The 'pilgrimage' of the Croix de Feu had taken place early in the morning.) The simultaneous presence in the Champs-Élysées of 200,000 singing the Internationale and shouting 'les Soviets Partout' and 'Le Front Populaire' and 200,000 more yelling 'La France aux Français' and 'Vive la Solidarité!' was bound to lead to trouble. For over an hour pandemonium was set loose, an immense mob yelling their heads off as they had never yelled since February 6. There were innumerable fights all along the

pavements; café windows were smashed, and if only a single revolver had gone off there would have been a street battle worse than the Sixth of February. It was touch and go. There were many who suspected Laval of the deliberate intention to create a 'civil war atmosphere' in Paris, which might have intimidated the Chamber.

Worse still, on November 16, there was the shooting affray at Limoges, when a crowd of Croix de Feu men fired at the anti-Fascist 'counter-demonstration', as it was on the point of breaking into the riding-school where the meeting was taking place. About twenty anti-Fascists were wounded, two of them seriously, and in the brawl that followed, some of the Croix de Feu were also injured. It was claimed that the Croix de Feu had acted in legitimate self-defence; but whatever the rights and wrongs of the case, the moral of the story was that the Croix de Feu were responsible for bloodshed, and that they were a grave menace to public order. So when the Chamber met, the Left were determined to exact the required anti-Fascist legislation from the Laval Government. Laval promised that the matter would be dealt with in a few days; but insisted upon the financial question being settled first. To this the Chamber agreed.

For there was at that time something of a financial panic in Paris, not unlike the panic of May–June. It was somehow assumed that if Laval were overthrown, his policy of deflation would be abandoned, and the franc would go. During the three previous weeks the Finance Committee had been insisting on a revision of the economy decrees affecting the lower government officials, pensioners and small bondholders. Laval claimed that if he agreed to the measures proposed by the Committee, the Budget deficit would be increased by two milliard francs; and his work of financial restoration would be 'compromised'. In the end, the Finance Committee gave way nearly all along the line, and Laval, to save their faces, made a few graceful concessions.

But it was still uncertain whether the decrees would be ratified by the Chamber; and in the second fortnight in November alone the Bank of France lost about three milliard francs of gold.

The Chamber had, indeed, no serious desire to overthrow

Laval on the financial issue; for it had not become converted to devaluation; and there seemed no other clear alternative to Laval's policy. Allowing for the promise he had made to revise certain economy cuts, it finally approved his 'franc saving' policy by a majority of seventy-seven. From the election point of view, it was not too bad to make him responsible for the unpopular financial policy.

The debate was the occasion for a brilliant speech in favour of devaluation by M. Paul Reynaud, and another by M. Marcel Déat; but the Socialists and Communists, though condemning Laval's policy of deflation, declared themselves 'equally hostile to devaluation', which made M. Paul Reynaud laugh. M. Laval said that nobody had been deceived by his financial policy. When the Chamber granted him plenary powers, it knew that the Treasury deficit for the year would be one of twenty milliards, and that he was proposing to save ten milliards. 'The government has acted. True, I have neither the eloquence of M. Reynaud nor the drive of M. Déat. My intelligence is smaller than theirs, but I have courage. In the present circumstances an election programme is not sufficient.' 'The government has acted'; – it was Laval's favourite phrase.

On December 3 the great debate on the Fascist Leagues began; and it was clear at once that Laval was in for a rough time. It is true that Laval had agreed to place the Chauvin Report (for which the Radicals had clamoured) on the agenda; and on the morning of the debate it was learned that M. Bucard, the leader of the Francistes – (an insignificant organisation of bad-imitation Nazis – and the only one openly calling itself Fascist) had been arrested at Strasbourg for holding an unauthorised meeting. This sop to the Chamber was a rather childish one; and M. Ramette, the Communist who was the first to speak, said that the arrest of bigger fry like La Rocque would have been more to the point. M. Guernut (Radical) struck the true note of the debate when he said: 'Either the government will change its methods, or we shall change the government.' Fully two-thirds of the Chamber cheered. It was a bad outlook for Laval. And M. Rucart, another Radical, declared that 'the Republicans could no longer have any confidence in M. Laval'.

It must be said that the allegations brought against the Croix de Feu were not nearly as terrible as those made by the *Populaire* in October. A favourite theme with the Opposition speakers was the 'incitement to murder' of which the *Action Française* and the *Solidarité Française* had been guilty; they also claimed that the Croix de Feu were 'preparing civil war'; they recalled how La Rocque had said that he 'would not tolerate the formation of a Left-Wing Government'; they enumerated the Croix de Feu rallies at Algiers, Reims, etc.; and M. Paganon, the Radical Minister of the Interior – a good-natured, bearded young gorilla – was well rapped over the knuckles for 'having personally asked Colonel de la Rocque to help in maintaining law and order in Algeria'. M. Paganon afterwards explained this away by saying that he had simply warned the Croix de Feu that they would be held responsible for any disorders. The explanation was not impressive, and turning to M. Paganon, M. Guernut said paternally: 'My dear Paganon, I am very fond of you. You are a Republican and you owe everything to the Republic. You would make an excellent Minister in normal times; but nowadays we need somebody more fierce and determined and less inclined to say "Let's wait and see".'

But the proposed 'March on Paris' did not seem to be taken seriously any longer, and it was conspicuously absent from the thousand allegations made against the Croix de Feu.

The second day of the debate was devoted to speeches for the defence. M. Vallat, for the Croix de Feu, and M. Taittinger, for the Jeunesses Patriotes, were the two principal advocates. They were, at times, almost apologetic in tone; they said that Limoges was the first case where the Croix de Feu had fired the first shots; and argued that if the Leagues were to be prohibited the same measures should be applied to the Socialist and Communist 'troops'. People wondered whether they were not trying to help Laval by being so mild; – for the Left was greatly incensed against him, and it was not expected that the government would secure more than a very small majority.

And then, on December 6, exactly twenty-two months after the Sixth of February, an extraordinary thing happened. I went to the Chamber early that morning, although it was

known that Laval would not speak until the afternoon; and the public and Press galleries were almost deserted. M. Delbos, the Deputy-Speaker was in the Chair, a sure sign of a 'second-rate debate'. He announced that the Chamber would hear 'the remaining interpellations on the Leagues'. The debate began in a tame fashion. The first speaker was a Socialist who accused the government of complicity with the Croix de Feu. And then M. Ybarnégaray suddenly mounted the Tribune. A distinguished ex-soldier, and always a fair opponent, he is one of the few members of the Right for whom the Opposition have a personal regard. The Chamber heard, not without surprise, that M. Ybarnégaray had come to speak on behalf of the Croix de Feu, with its 712,000 members, and of his friend Colonel de la Rocque. But he made the announcement with such simple sincerity that it caused no uproar. He said that a legend had been woven round the Croix de Feu and their leader. The Colonel had been described as a conspirator, as a budding dictator, as an enemy of the Republic. 'Those of you who know him (cries of "Paganon!") know that this is not the case.' A Communist intervened and asked why several members of the Croix de Feu had recently left the organisation.

M. Ybarnégaray (alluding to M. Doriot): 'Has such a thing never happened in your Party?' (Laughter.) 'If you want to know the truth, Colonel de la Rocque got rid of these people precisely because they were tending to drag the movement into a dangerous adventure.'

The reference was to M. de Maud'huy and other Fascist extremists; and it was an apt introduction to the 'peace proposal' that was to follow. 'The enemies of the Republic,' he went on, 'are just as hostile to the Croix de Feu as they are to the Republic itself;' – they were being constantly attacked by the Royalist *Action Française*.

'La Rocque does not belong to any financial oligarchy,' Ybarnégaray said. 'He is clean and he is straight. The Croix de Feu do not wish to destroy the Republic; they only wish to renovate it and to achieve reconciliation among all Frenchmen. Is there anyone who wants France to live in an atmosphere of Civil War and be divided for ever into two warring camps? Can we not agree on a number of

laws which will put an end to this deplorable state of affairs?'

The dissolution of the Leagues, he said, was not an effective solution. The solution lay in disarmament. 'I swear upon my honour,' he said, 'that the Croix de Feu have no munition stores. But the disarmament must apply to individuals.' (Loud cheers.) He thereupon read the text of two Bills which he asked the government to adopt:

(1) Any person found carrying arms shall be punished with one to three years' imprisonment.[1]

(2) Any foreigner guilty of the same offence shall be immediately expelled from France as well as his family.

At that moment M. Léon Blum, the Socialist leader, suddenly rose to speak. Until February 6, he said, there had been no organisations on the Left which even remotely resembled the semi-military Leagues; and although there could still be no question of any analogy between these groups of 'self-defence' and an organisation like the Croix de Feu, he wished to say this to the Chamber: the question of individual arms was only a question of secondary importance, for if one tried hard enough, one could always find a revolver. What was far more dangerous was an organisation like the Croix de Feu, which represented a private army capable of rapid mobilisation. 'And this,' M. Blum continued, 'is what I wish to say to M. Ybarnégaray. We are prepared to dissolve our organisations in so far as they are semi-military in nature. But are you prepared to do the same?'

M. Thorez, for the Communists, declared that he identified himself with M. Blum's words – the Communist Party would also dissolve its self-defence formations. And then, in tense silence, M. Ybarnégaray replied: 'Yes; in the name of the Croix de Feu, I declare that we also are prepared to dissolve our association in so far as it is semi-military in character – and I use the word "semi-military" in the sense that you, M. Blum, have given it.' The whole scene, and M. Ybarnégaray's

[1]Asked in 1934 before the Parliamentary Committee inquiring into the February riots, whether the Croix de Feu were armed, Colonel de la Rocque said: 'No, they are not armed, except that three Frenchmen in four carry a revolver, and the proportion must be about the same in the Croix de Feu.' One of the great difficulties in France is the almost unrestricted sale of firearms

undertaking, created a tremendous sensation. And M. Laval, who had been watching the scene with a contented air declared that 'the government would draw the necessary conclusions from what it had heard'.

Paris was delighted with what had happened. It looked as though the threat of civil war, which seemed to have hung over France since the Sixth of February had suddenly vanished, and that France had suddenly sunk all past differences and restored her national unity. There were many happy faces in Paris that day, as they read the special editions of *Paris-Midi* with their glowing descriptions of the 'National Reconciliation'.

There were, of course, some cynics who declared that the whole show had been 'put up' by Laval; only they wondered whether he had really foreseen Blum's question; and whether the trick had not gone a little further than he had expected. Even so, Paris was happy, and this happiness communicated itself to the Chamber; and in the afternoon, before the 'anti-Fascist' Bills had actually come up for discussion, Laval obtained a vote of confidence by the enormous majority of 132. Without the 'scene', he would have been lucky with 32. Unfortunately the 'reconciliation' did not last, and that evening already there were many who called it 'the *journée de Lamourette*'. L'Abbé Lamourette was a member of the Legislative Assembly, who, on July 7, 1792, made such a moving speech in favour of reconciliation that the fiercest political enemies, overcome by emotion, embraced and kissed; and a deputation, led by the Abbé in person, was sent to Versailles to inform the King of the happy event. Before the deputation had returned the quarrels had started again. In 1794 l'Abbé Lamourette was guillotined.

Something similar happened on December 6. No sooner had the Laval Government been given its majority than the Chamber proceeded to examine the government's 'anti-Fascist' Bills, and not finding them nearly stiff enough, amended them in a manner that was not likely to please Colonel de la Rocque.

Worse still, Ybarnégaray's speech caused an uproar among the more extreme Croix de Feu members. There were several spectacular resignations that night, and the rival Fascist

organisations – the Jeunesses Patriotes and the Solidarité Française – treated La Rocque as a traitor. M.Taittinger, the leader of the Jeunesses Patriotes, declared that the Croix de Feu had handed themselves over, body and soul, to the Front Populaire. M. de Kerillis wept in the *Echo de Paris* over these fratricidal quarrels, and the poor Colonel was in great difficulties. He published a *communiqué* stating that while M. Ybarnégaray's 'speech proper' had been approved by the Croix de Feu in advance, his answer to M. Blum and M. Thorez was 'in the nature of an improvisation' – which suggested that the undertaking to dissolve the Croix de Feu 'as a semi-military organisation' did not commit the Croix de Feu to anything. Yet, M. Ybarnégaray's words were absolutely precise. The 'anti-Fascist' laws, as they were ultimately voted, after a long *navette* between the Chamber and the Senate made the following provisions:

The government may dissolve by decree [M. Laval's original Bill provided that this be done by a Court decision, but both the Chamber and the Senate distrusted magistrates in this matter] any groups or associations: (1) which are guilty of provoking armed demonstrations in the street; (2) which, through their military organisation, are in the nature of shock troops or private militias (sports organisations and societies for military training recognised by the government do not come under this definition); (3) or any association whose object is to conspire against the integrity of the national territory or to make an armed attempt on the republican form of government. Persons guilty of having participated in the direct or indirect reconstruction of a dissolved association will be liable to a maximum fine of 5,000 francs, and to six months' to two years' imprisonment. . . .

All uniforms, badges, and emblems of the dissolved organisations will be confiscated, as well as any arms and other material in their possession.[1]

The second law imposes severe penalties (fine up to 1,000 francs and three months' to two years' imprisonment) on persons found guilty of carrying arms 'or any other weapon

[1] This law was applied to the Camelots du Roi on February 13, 1936, after their assault on M. Blum, and to the Croix de Feu, and three other Fascist Leagues on June 18. (See Chapter XXI.)

dangerous to public safety' at, or in connection with, any demonstration or meeting.

The third law, directed against papers like the *Action Française* and the *Solidarité Française*, makes anyone found guilty of direct incitement in the Press to murder, theft, robbery, incendiarism, etc., liable to varying terms of imprisonment. (Maurras was to be the first victim of this law.)

It is true enough that the Great Reconciliation of December 6 did not last; but it had, none the less, a soothing effect on the more excited spirits; and it marked, above all, a genuine change in the nature of the Croix de Feu movement. It tended to become a political party, and – the backbone of all the conservative elements in the country. M. de Kerillis, the qualified spokesman of the Right-Wing Parties, was deeply offended by Taittinger's savage attack on La Rocque, and by the discredit it was casting on the Croix de Feu movement. La Rocque's immediate followers claimed, however, that they were not much perturbed by such attacks. 'We shall lose 50,000 extremists – and some of them for all we care, may go over to the Jeunesses Patriotes; but we shall gain 200,000 new members, who up till now have been put off by the idea that we were a "civil war army".' The Croix de Feu were clearly becoming good Tories, who had realised that the country as a whole, and Parliament in particular, were too hostile to anything that looked too openly Fascist. They must also have realised that La Rocque had never really missed any 'opportunity' to seize power: *for no such opportunity had ever really existed. And La Rocque knew it.*

M. de Kerillis, delighted with this evolution of the Croix de Feu, was proposing to run 500 Croix de Feu candidates in the coming General Election. There were no more threats of violence or 'direct action' from the Croix de Feu. I remember a Croix de Feu meeting at the Salle Wagram early in 1936 – I think it was in February. La Rocque said that the Croix de Feu represented 'the conscience of France'; that everywhere their ideas had been sown, that 'a rich harvest was rising all over France', and that the Croix de Feu ideas 'would soon be in power'. His audience was still the same – clean, well-washed young men, who lustily cheered the Colonel; but they somehow felt that the Colonel was not quite saying the right thing.

They did not know where he was leading them – and was he leading them at all? His idea of installing a Croix de Feu 'cell' or, rather, a sort of *Blockwarte* – a Croix de Feu propaganda agent – in every house in France, seemed a poor imitation of the Nazi method. And, as Maud'huy, La Rocque's former henchman remarked shortly afterwards: 'what's the good of telling people that their *ideas* will be in power – when the chaps would like to be in power *themselves*.'

But although the Croix de Feu had become Tory, they still pretended to be something 'above Party' and therefore did not run candidates in the General Election. From their point of view it was a grave error. Having failed to march on Paris, after the model of Mussolini, they also failed to do what Hitler did – that is, to try to conquer the country 'legally'.

4. LAVAL'S SWAN-SONG

Having disposed of the troublesome 'Fascist problem' by means of the *coup de théâtre* of December 6, Laval was able to turn all his attention to foreign affairs, and to prepare for Sir Samuel Hoare's visit. Sir Samuel arrived on the following Saturday; – and we know what happened in England during the ten days that followed. British opinion, which might, in other circumstances, have swallowed the plan, now felt that it had been duped by all the loyalty-to-the-League stuff in the election campaign of the National Government, and Sir Samuel Hoare was forced out of office.

What were the French reactions? Frankly, the Hoare–Laval Plan did not at first arouse anything like the indignation it caused in England. People on the Right chuckled joyfully over the cynical *volte-face* of the British Government, and said that the British General Election was just as good a swindle as the Stavisky Affair.

The Left, on the other hand, were taken aback. Most of them did not mind very much about Abyssinia *per se*; but they were disturbed by this sudden change in British foreign policy. Did it mean, they said, that Abyssinia was a nuisance that had to be disposed of as quickly as possible, and that Britain would *then* return to a real League policy; or did it, on the contrary, mean, that Britain had never had any serious

intention of supporting the League? In this connection, the reports from London that the British Government was proposing to revise and 'sterilise' the League Covenant, by taking the sanctions mechanism out of it, were rather disquieting.

As the uproar in England grew louder, the French Left also became more violent in their criticism of the Hoare–Laval Plan. Pierre Cot loudly denounced the idea of placing a premium on aggression; and even Herriot showed that he was rather disgusted with the plan; and said that there must be a settlement acceptable to all – Italy, Abyssinia and the League.

At the Chamber, on December 13, Pierre Cot announced, amid loud cheers from the Left, that the plan was based 'not on the law of the League, but on the law of the jungle'.

At a public meeting two days later, Lord Cecil said that 'it would be infinitely regrettable if France and Great Britain were to disgrace themselves by sacrificing a little nation because they were afraid of a big nation. My sorrow would indeed be great if my country were responsible for such an act.'

And M. Paul-Boncour, who was at the meeting, said: 'Alas! the great ideals for which Lord Cecil and I have struggled for fifteen years are now in danger of being wrecked. But we, at least,' he said, 'cannot be held responsible for such treachery!'

Before going to Geneva on December 17, Laval appeared before the Chamber and secured a majority of fifty-two on a question of procedure; – which was rather thin. But although the Chamber did not overthrow him it clearly showed that he was not going to Geneva loaded with its blessings and good wishes. He was severely attacked by Pierre Cot, Blum and Péri (Communist), and Laval complained that he was going to Geneva 'in humiliating conditions'. The plan, he said, was merely 'a number of suggestions', and it was for the League to accept or reject it. He denied that it was inconsistent with the League Covenant and with the Proposals of the Committee of Five.

It may be noted in passing that Laval was by this time becoming very pessimistic. He was dissatisfied with Mussolini. Instead of promptly accepting the plan, and so confront-

ing the world with a *fait accompli*, he had preferred to make a bellicose speech at Pontinia. Even the French pro-Italian Press reflected to some extent Laval's discomfort. On December 18, Sir Samuel Hoare resigned, and, that same night, M. Herriot, unwilling to break up the Laval Government at that particular moment, resigned from the Presidency of the Radical Party.

The resignation of Sir Samuel Hoare was a terrible blow to Laval – but although he told Hoare on December 8 that they would 'stand or fall together', he changed his mind and did not resign. Instead, he carefully prepared his own defence in the great foreign debate that was to take place on December 27 and 28.

On December 26, the lobbies were very bad. Nearly everybody took for granted that the government would fall. There was that feeling, familiar to those who spend much time in the Chamber, that 'a change had become necessary', and that the Premier was 'played out'. When the debate opened, everything seemed to be working according to plan. It was like a law-court – with M. Laval in the Dock. He read out a written statement, which was listened to coldly, and without interruption. He defended the Anglo-French Plan, which he declared to be in the spirit of the Covenant, and said that he did not regret the efforts he had made to restore peace promptly. Unfortunately serious things had happened. Since Sir Samuel Hoare's resignation the British Government had declared the plan to be dead, and the Italian Government 'had not examined our proposals with the keenness and comprehension we had a right to expect from it. Nor had our task been facilitated by a certain speech' – a reference to the Pontinia speech that Mussolini delivered just before the House of Commons debate. In short, Laval seemed to suggest that the Italian Government had betrayed him and Sir Samuel Hoare – though he did not say that it had agreed in advance to accept the plan. He then proceeded to expound his theories of the limited capacities of the League, and said that while its universality should be welcomed as a doctrine, it was not an actual fact, and one had to make allowances for this. It was a realistic speech. 'I bear the British Government no grudge,' he concluded, 'for having rejected the last plan. Other

attempts will have to be made. They also may fail. But I do not allow myself to be discouraged. I shall persevere whatever happens in my constant and untiring efforts in favour of peace.' The tirade roused the anger of M. Blum. 'You are still there,' he said scathingly, 'and you are still telling us that you have a programme for the future. You actually seem to claim that your presence is an indispensable condition of peace. . . . Your unpardonable fault has been to act as the interpreter of Mussolini's pressure and blackmail. You allowed the war to start in Africa because you did not have the courage to tell Mussolini from the outset that France would be faithful to the League.'

People spoke of France's traditional League policy, Blum continued, yet this time she had not led the way: she had scarcely followed. Laval had done everything to delay and discourage League action. The Chamber should, like the League of Nations, dismiss Laval.

And then M. Delbos, the future Foreign Minister in the Front Populaire Government spoke. In his blunt, gruff, dispassionate manner, he spoke like a judge. Laval listened with a stony expression on his face. Once or twice he smiled ironically. M. Laval, Delbos said, had not put the brake on Italy. He had, on the contrary, tried to put the brake on the League. He had constantly been suggesting that the sanctions would 'not really' be sanctions. The Paris Plan was contrary to the mandate France and Britain had received from the League; the sanctions were to be replaced by a reward. In England Sir Samuel Hoare had been driven out of office. But what about France? Laval, Delbos said, had been following a blind alley, and France had reached the end of it. She had discontented everybody, and now she must go back – back to the League Covenant.

The Little Entente was deeply disappointed in France. Poland would have more regard for her if she worked more harmoniously with England. Germany had been greatly impressed by England's will to support the League, and was waiting for the outcome of the sanctions experiment.

Mussolini must be made to see the truth: either he must be impressed by the co-operation of the League Powers, and accept a settlement consistent with the Covenant, or else he

must be faced with a League coalition, which to attack would mean suicide for Italy. M. Laval was, in the meantime, trying to suggest that he could assure peace by coming to terms with Hitler. The Radicals were all in favour of it: but it must not be done at anyone else's expense. A Franco-German alliance directed against Russia would end in the enslavement of France.

Poor Delbos! If only he had known how complicated the whole problem of 'collective security' would become by the time he had moved into the Quai d'Orsay! Good old days of December 1935 when the League was still the League.

Paul Reynaud and many others also spoke in the same vein.

Two-thirds of the Chamber had been worked up into a state of righteous indignation by the time Laval began his second speech – at the end of the debate on December 28. It was, in a way, the greatest speech he had ever made. He knew that this was no longer a time for brief written statements. This time he spoke for over an hour. The speech was, at times, of high rhetorical quality with touches of pathos, which one scarcely expected from a 'realist' like Laval. He began *con dolore* as musicians would say. It was the voice of injured innocence. 'In listening to so much criticism I have been wondering what crime I have committed against my country and against peace. . . . I have remained faithful to the League Covenant. The League was born out of human sufferings, and its Covenant remains our international law.' This was no longer the 'realistic' speech of the day before. Was he being blamed for not having agreed to military and naval sanctions? The British Government had rejected them in advance on September 9. Had France tried to postpone sanctions? No; she had declared herself ready to apply them within four days; – other countries had proposed much longer periods. As for the oil embargo, nothing was decided, because, before the meeting at Geneva where it was to have been discussed, Hoare had come to Paris. He skipped over the Hoare–Laval Plan; and no longer argued about the 'limited possibilities' of the League. All he said was that the plan had done nothing to spoil Franco-British relations. He and Mr. Eden had always entertained the most cordial and friendly relations. (There were some ironical smiles at this point.)

He had not ruined Anglo-French relations. Sir Samuel Hoare's complaint that 'not a man, not a ship, not a machine' had been moved by any nation other than Great Britain was pointless. Nobody had been asked to move anything; the British had moved their navy into the Mediterranean entirely on their own initiative. Laval then referred to the Anglo-French Staff talks that had opened on October 10 – naval talks which, on December 10, were extended to the Army and the Air Force. (Loud cheers.) 'It is very painful, I admit, that a Minister of Foreign Affairs should be obliged to reveal such details in defending his policy.' He then repeated that he had never given Mussolini a free hand in Abyssinia – all he had abandoned in favour of Italy was France's economic claims in Abyssinia, with the exception of the Jibuti–Addis-Ababa Railway.

'Peace is fragile, and I can assure you that I was capable of measuring the consequences that even a distant war would have on European peace, and France's security.' Besides, the French Ambassador in Rome had been continuously reminding Mussolini that France would be faithful to the Covenant. It was true that he (Laval) had at the same time done his best to arrive at conciliation – and he was not ashamed of it. He and Mr. Eden would continue this work.

As for Germany, was it being suggested that he was conducting suspect negotiations with that country? Stressing his words, M. Laval said: 'In my opinion there can be no solid peace in Europe without a Franco-German *rapprochement*. But I must add that I do not wish such an agreement except as part of the organisation of European security. "What wonderful horizons would open before us if this were possible," I said to Sir Samuel Hoare. "Our two countries could then bring Germany into the system of collective security."'

As the speech progressed, the hostility of the Chamber gradually melted. The cheers which came at first only from the Right spread to the Centre, and even some members of the Left cheered at one or two points. 'The vote you are going to give is grave,' he concluded. 'It is not the fate of the Foreign Minister that is at stake. I have been fifteen months at the Quai d'Orsay, and six months Premier. I have asked for nothing. You have assigned me a hard task – yes, hard (loud

cheers). With the help of all my colleagues I have saved the franc. If the Chamber allows us to continue, the Budget will be voted in two days. Will you regret that?'

But there was one very paradoxical thing about this speech. It was a perfect League speech; and yet it was cheered, not by the defenders of the League, but only by those who are hostile towards it or luke-warm. Those most in sympathy with Laval's 'realism' and who should have been revolted by his 'Genevese' speech, voted most readily for Laval. Those who should have been deeply impressed by it refused him their confidence. *Neither the Right nor the Left believed in Laval's sincerity.* He got a majority of twenty votes. It was touch and go.

How indeed did he get a majority at all? – for the majority of the House was unquestionably hostile to him. Was it the effect of his final (and unanswered) speech – no doubt a brilliant performance in its own way? Was it the subtle pressure that had been brought to bear on a number of doubtful deputies? For it was well known that a number of ministers had been engaged earlier in the day in what may be called 'individual canvassing'. Was it, lastly, the consideration that a Cabinet crisis would delay the voting of the Budget before January 1, and of the anti-Fascist Bills (which were still before the Senate), and generally upset the Parliamentary calendar? Probably all three had an influence on the vote – and so saved Laval by the skin of his teeth. There was perhaps also a fourth reason. It was alleged on the following day that during the count the ballot-papers had been tampered with. Six deputies declared that, according to the official returns, they had voted for the government – in reality, they had voted against. There was also some talk of the *armoire à confiture* – the 'jam cupboard' at the Chamber – where the ballot-papers of half a dozen chronic absentees are kept – and which may, in a great emergency, be discreetly raided by government supporters.

Be that as it may, Laval – the central figure in French affairs in 1935 – had steered his way by hook and by crook into 1936, still Premier and still Foreign Minister. But not for long. In the middle of January, the Radicals broke into open revolt against Laval. The Budget had been passed; the anti-

Fascist laws had been passed; as Foreign Minister Laval was played out; somebody was needed who would make a better match for Mr. Eden; and the election was only three months ahead. Laval was too wily to be allowed to 'make the elections' – for there is still an old (and mistaken) belief among Radicals that the government, with Prefects and secret funds at its command, can influence an election. Besides, any further association with the National Government of M. Laval, was likely to damage the election prospects for the Radicals.

So they rebelled.

It was inevitable.

Only, one may wonder whether the Locarno coup would have happened, at any rate on March 7, if Laval had still been in power. He would have discouraged the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact, which provided Hitler with an excuse – however feeble – for his coup; perhaps Laval would have persuaded him not to do it. But that is only speculation. What is a fact is that Laval was one of the makers of the present great disorder – even though he left it to his successors to bear the worst consequences of his work.

It was at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Radical Party at the Hotel Continental on January 18, while M. Laval was at Geneva, that the death sentence of the Laval Government was signed. The resolution, which was passed unanimously (less one vote), said that M. Laval's methods were 'contrary to the doctrines of the Radical Party'.

Two days earlier Laval had still obtained a majority of seventy-six from the Chamber on a question of procedure; but it was no good. That same night Herriot announced his intention to leave the government. He was in disagreement with Laval's foreign policy; and he was deeply offended by the fierce campaign that the Press of the Right had been conducting against him for some weeks past – a campaign which, he felt, Laval could have stopped. Moreover, the election was close at hand. At the meeting of the Radical Executive, M. Jean Zay, the future Minister of Education in the Blum Cabinet, said that it was 'a miracle that M. Herriot could have endured M. Laval for so long'. It was believed, after M. Herriot had announced his resignation from the Laval Cabinet that he would stand for the Presidency of the Radical Party,

and that one of his purposes in resigning from the government was to keep M. Daladier out. But that was not the case. He declared that he would in no circumstances stand for the Presidency of the Party, and Daladier was elected almost unanimously. This election and Herriot's retirement were symbolic. They meant that the Radical Party was now definitely committed to the Front Populaire policy.

The Laval Government, without meeting the Chamber again, was disrupted from within. At the Cabinet Meeting on January 22 (the day after the death of King George), the Radical Ministers handed their resignations to M. Laval. Laval took it calmly; without any visible indignation. After resigning the Premiership, he gave himself a 'good character' in a statement to the Press: 'I did not seek power,' he said. 'If I took office in June, it was because I considered it my duty to do so. I am conscious of having carried out my task. The franc is intact; the Budget has been reduced by twenty per cent and there are signs of economic and agricultural recovery. The tension between Frenchmen has shown signs of relaxing; there is hope of a national reconciliation.'

As regards foreign affairs, he said: 'During the past months great difficulties have arisen. But peace has been maintained.(!) France's obligations towards the League have been observed. Her friendships and alliances are intact, and the independence of her foreign policy has been safeguarded and strengthened. Such are the results. France remains mistress of her own destiny.'

He departed from the Quai d'Orsay with an unperturbed air; not like an evicted tenant, but like a man going away for a holiday. And yet, looking back on it all, he said to a friend that day: *'Mussolini, quel salaud tout de même!'*

Two days later the Sarraut Government was formed – in good time for King George's funeral.

CHAPTER XIII

FRANCE A SECOND-CLASS POWER?

THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT AND HITLER'S LOCARNO COUP

THE unfortunate Sarraut Government, which scarcely six weeks after its formation was to face the worst international crisis since the War, was regarded at first as being merely a stop-gap Cabinet which would 'carry on' until the General Election, and do nothing of any importance, except get the Franco-Soviet Pact ratified. The Socialists did not even expect it to break away from Laval's deflationist policy, except that they asked that some of the economy decrees be 'humanised' a little further. It was a mixed crew. Most of the Ministers were Radicals; but it also included many Centre Members. The Premier, M. Sarraut, was an old man of sixty-four, looking sometimes like a village *curé*, and sometimes like Mr. Pickwick, with an unfortunate platform manner, and a verbose, florid style of oratory. But he was a Sarraut, the brother of Maurice Sarraut, the Editor of the *Dépêche* of Toulouse, the most influential Radical paper in the country, and was himself one of the owners of the paper. He was a kindly old man, and his inordinate fondness of Paris night-life was the subject of much good-natured ragging. He was nicknamed the 'Sphinx', in honour of a well-known *dancing* in Montparnasse.

Albert Sarraut was an old-fashioned Radical, with leanings towards the Centre (in 1926 he was one of Poincaré's most whole-hearted supporters) and with no great affection for the Socialists, who had overthrown his short-lived government in November 1933. In the past he had been violently anti-Communist, and, when he was Poincaré's Minister of the Interior, he proclaimed them '*the* enemy'. But there was a special reason for this. For when he was Governor-General of Indo-China soon after the War (and he was one of the most competent and liberal of French colonial administrators) the Communists used to give him a great deal of trouble.

Still, by the time he became Premier in 1936, he had largely overcome his dislike of the Communists; the unduly frequent reminders made by the Right that he had called them *the* enemy, grew stale before long; and in his anti-Fascist speech – the most vigorous and impressive speech he had ever made – after the Royalist assault on Léon Blum on February 13, he showed the greatest sympathy for the Front Populaire as a whole. That evening he had the Camelots du Roi dissolved, and two days later he allowed the Front Populaire to hold their vast protest demonstration against the 'Fascist' attempt on the Socialist leader's life.

His government was not, however, a purely Left Government, still less a Front Populaire Government. It included some of the most determined enemies of Laval, such as M. Guernut, the Minister of Education, M. Déat, the Minister of Air (this brilliant economist knew little about aeroplanes, but knew a great deal about the economics of the army contracts, and soon made himself very unpopular with aeroplane manufacturers) and M. Delbos, the Minister of Justice, who was to become Foreign Minister under Blum, and who had made a slashing attack on the foreign policy of Laval. On the other hand, it included M. Nicolle, a textile magnate, deeply detested by the Lille Socialists, and M. Thellier, whom M. Blum described as 'the representative of clerical reaction'. M. Flandin was Foreign Minister, and in taking office he assured his party, the Alliance Démocratique, who disliked the Sarraut Government, that 'he agreed with the foreign policy of M. Laval, except in some details' – which was not quite what one would have expected from the Foreign Minister of a government that had been formed as a reaction against Laval.

Still, the Sarraut Government was not badly received by the Left. 'Such as you are,' M. Blum said, 'you have the great virtue of having taken Laval's place. Anything is better.' Rather a lopsided compliment which reminded one of the barber's words in *Don Quixote*: 'And even if my lady had a beard, she would still be fairer than your Dulcinea of Tobosa.' But to the Left, even a bearded lady was better than Laval.

It was expected that the Sarraut Government would be merely a 'stop-gap' until the election, but M. Sarraut soon

discovered that in this history-making epoch of ours, it was no fun to rule a great country for even a day. No sooner did Sarraut and Flandin settle down to a short rest after obtaining a big majority at the Chamber than Paris was overrun by Kings and Prime Ministers from all over Europe (they had been at King George's funeral in London) and there were ten days of luncheons and dinners and receptions and diplomatic conversations. There were discussions about Austrian independence and the Danubian Pact, and the Russo-Rumanian Pact, the missing link in the Franco-Czecho-Russian security system; and there was the hope of an arrangement between Austria and Jugoslavia – but this was upset by Prince Otto's sudden arrival in Paris; whereupon Prince Paul of Jugoslavia refused to see Starhemberg whom he suspected of Hapsburg plotting. And Dr. Hodza, the Czech Premier, discussed with the French Government an economic reorganisation of the Danubian Basin and urged them to ratify the Franco-Soviet Pact, the foundation stone of the new security system, as quickly as possible; and the question even arose of assigning to Russia the role of guarantor of Austrian Independence.

The Paris talks were rather inconclusive; but they nevertheless revealed a new tendency in security planning; – a tendency which was to be checked by Germany's Locarno coup, scarcely a month later.

The first important step that the Sarraut Government took, soon after the foreign kings and statesmen had departed, was to submit the Franco-Soviet Pact to the Chamber for ratification. The German Press had, for some weeks past, conducted a violent campaign against the pact, and had claimed – although the opposite opinion had been given by the British and Italian Governments, as well as by British and Italian jurists – that it was incompatible with the Treaty of Locarno. In spite of this Press campaign Herr von Neurath had, at the end of January, assured the British Government that Germany had no intention of taking action 'about the demilitarised zone' in the near future; and it was, somehow, not believed that Germany would *really* go so far as to violate Locarno. The German Press campaign was simply regarded as an attempt to persuade France not to ratify the Franco-Soviet Pact, which,

of course, went contrary to Hitler's doctrine of 'localised' war, and to his desire for a free hand in the East.

The ratification debate, which began on February 13, was a long one. It took up six Chamber sittings and did not end until February 27. At the first meeting M. Torrès, the Rapporteur of the Bill, who is also a leading French jurist, explained why exactly the pact was perfectly compatible with Locarno. It was, he said, strictly a League Pact, compatible in every detail with the League Covenant; it was even less 'automatic' than the Franco-Czech and Franco-Polish Pacts of mutual assistance, which formed part of the Locarno agreements; and special provisions were contained in the Protocol attached to the Franco-Soviet Pact in terms of which France could act only in agreement with the Locarno guarantors, even when the League Council could reach no unanimous decision, and France was free to defend 'right and justice' of her own accord in terms of Article Fifteen, paragraph seven of the Covenant. Or, as M. Torrès put it, 'before acting under this treaty, France would have to ascertain whether Great Britain and Italy agreed with her on the circumstances of the aggression and held the same State responsible of aggression as she did'. Germany, M. Torrès said, had been asked to join the pact; if she was persisting in her refusal, it was because she was opposed to 'indivisible peace'. By ratifying the pact, France would only reaffirm her own League doctrine and refuse to accept the German doctrine of the 'localisation' of war. 'If Germany,' he said, 'has no desire of aggression, why would she refuse to adhere to a purely defensive agreement?'

French opinion was strongly divided in its attitude to the Franco-Soviet Pact. Although M. Laval had signed the pact, in May 1935, the Right knew that he had deliberately delayed ratification, largely for fear of quarrelling with Germany, and also because he no longer believed in the possibility of restoring his friendly relations with the Left whom, in signing the pact, he had tried to please.

In the past many people on the Right, who regarded Germany as Public Enemy No. 1, had been in favour of the pact and had warmly encouraged M. Barthou's successful work for a Franco-Russian *rapprochement*. In 1934 Henri de Kerillis

had written enthusiastic articles about the Red Army and Air Force; and Pertinax (who was more consistent than de Kerillis) had maintained ever since 1933 that France and Russia must be 'on the same side'. Without having any exaggerated notions about the Red Army, he felt, none the less, that it was important, in case of war, to prevent Germany from using Russia, if not as an ally, at least as a source of raw materials. In this he agreed with most of the French Army leaders, including General Weygand. But, regardless of what the generals thought and of what many of them had recently felt themselves, the deputies of the Right were now determined to vote against the ratification of the pact. The objections they raised, in the course of that interminable debate, were of every variety.

M. de Lasteyrie, formerly Poincaré's Finance Minister, objected to the pact because it made no provision for at least a partial repayment of Russia's pre-Revolution debts which, he said, amounted to no less than twenty-five milliard pre-War (or one hundred and twenty-five milliard post-War) francs. M. Fernand Laurent argued that the sole purpose of Russia's surprising *volte-face* in joining the League was to get France to protect her against German aggression; others spoke of the very doubtful military value of the Red Army and Air Force; the Red Army, they said, was at its best capable of only defensive action – which was no help to France; but the greatest objection raised by the Right was of an internal order: the pact legitimatised, as it were, the French Communist Party, and gave it an air of national respectability; with the result that the Third International could in future ravage France with impunity. M. Philippe Henriot, nicknamed 'Ascari' for his pro-Italian and pro-Fascist sentiments, attacked the Franco-Soviet Pact with his usual violence and venom. He produced what he claimed to be evidence of cheques paid at different times to the French Communist Party and to leading Communists by the Third International, and wound up his speech in the midst of an infernal uproar by addressing M. Sarraut thus: 'Monsieur le Président du Conseil, we shall ratify the pact once you have arrested these scoundrels (*cette canaille*), who are living on the money they receive for betraying their own country.'

These anti-Communist arguments against the pact received vigorous support from M. Jacques Doriot, the former Communist leader, who had now become violently anti-Soviet. Talking like a man with 'inside knowledge' (his former Communist pals listened to him in contemptuous silence), Doriot claimed that the French Communist leaders regarded war as a means of achieving world revolution. If a war broke out the Soviets would abandon their French allies in the middle of it, and try to bring about a revolution in France. The ex-Communist's speech was loudly cheered by the Right and Centre. And M. Xavier Vallat, in protesting against the pact said that it was no good using the old argument that François I had allied himself with Soliman the Magnificent. After all, the Sultan did not keep a Moslem Party in France, expecting it to overthrow the Monarchy and replace the Bible by the Koran.

The references to Germany and to the reactions the ratification might produce there were fewer than the references to the duplicity of the U.S.S.R.

M. Taittinger, the leader of the Jeunesses Patriotes, in a speech which rather implied that Germany had better be given a free hand in the East, said that relations between France and Germany were 'by no means bad at the present time'; that the French team at the German winter sports had been received with great cordiality; and that it was no good doing anything that might spoil these cordial relations. Yet Germany was waiting for an opportunity to remilitarise the Rhineland; and the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact, which she regarded as a menace, would give her that opportunity. 'It would be bad,' M. Taittinger said, 'to offend Germany's national sentiment.' And M. Rossé, the Alsatian autonomist, was even more explicit. After repeating the German arguments against the pact, he said: 'These German arguments are juridically unsound; M. Torrès has demonstrated this; and representatives of the French Government have repeated it time and again. But in spite of all the denials made in Paris, London, Rome and Moscow, Germany continues to interpret the pact in her own way. It is therefore obvious that the ratification of the pact will shake the foundations of peace on our Eastern frontier, and delay for a very

long time any agreement between France and Germany. France must be very, very cautious in her relations with Germany, who is rearming day and night, and is educating her people in a spirit which I need not describe.'

The pact was defended with much vigour by the Left – above all, by the Communists and the Radicals. The Socialists who in the recent past had openly criticised the pact, were still rather lukewarm. M. Spinasse, the future Minister of Economic Affairs in the Blum Government, who spoke on behalf of the Socialists, said: 'The whole value of such pacts depends on the orientation one is prepared to give them. They are beneficial in so far as they bring us nearer the aim we have set ourselves, and in so far as they may help us to take up again the interrupted task of general disarmament and to draw up a convention which the European nations can propose or oppose to Nazi Germany, and in so far as they create a situation more favourable to the examination of the real problems of peace – such as the economic problems.' In short, with his *in so fars* M. Spinasse was not wildly enthusiastic; and there were no doubt many Socialists who voted for the ratification largely for the sake of the Front Populaire and the unity of the Left parties.

But the Radicals and Communists were all in favour of the pact. M. Herriot, who had advocated a Franco-Soviet *rapprochement* for years, and who sincerely believed Russia's entry into the League of Nations to be an event of the first magnitude, treated the pact as his own child. It would be a crime for France, he said, to turn her back on Russia, a great country desiring peace as much as France did. He dismissed the objections made by the Right as irrelevant. As for Germany's objection to the pact, M. Herriot said: 'I may say that on May 25, 1935, twenty-three days after the signing of the pact, there was a German note which, while recognising that the Locarno Pact was not affected by the Franco-Soviet Pact, naturally made a number of reservations.'[1] M. Herriot

[1]This passage was reported in most of the papers in a condensed form: M. Herriot said that on May 25, Germany had recognised that the Franco-Soviet Pact was compatible with Locarno' – which immediately produced a *communiqué* from Berlin saying that Germany had never recognised anything of the sort. Even so, M. Herriot's exact words were somewhat misleading, and would probably have served the German purpose equally well.

also dwelt on the overwhelming strength of the Russian army which, he said, was 1,300,000 strong, and had reserves amounting to 13,000,000.

And M. Pierre Cot declared that the Soviet Air Force, 'with 3,000 first-line aeroplanes,' was the most powerful in the world.

Unfortunately, these extravagant statements by the Radical enthusiasts – which could, naturally, not be taken at their face value – played into the hands of the German Press, which, on the strength of M. Herriot's Red Steam-roller, proceeded to justify Germany's rearmament and treaty violations.

The Sarraut Government naturally supported the ratification of the pact, which it declared to be part of France's League policy. As for Germany's objections, M. Flandin invited her, if still in doubt, to submit the question of its alleged non-compatibility with Locarno, to the Hague Court – a proposal of which a great deal more was to be heard later.

The pact was ratified by the Chamber on February 27, by 353 votes to 164. In the Senate it was ratified by the enormous majority of 226 against 48. But that was on March 12 – after the Locarno coup. Many Senators, until then uncompromisingly hostile to the pact, now withdrew their opposition.

Two days after the Chamber vote, a 'sensational' interview with Hitler was published simultaneously in *Paris-Midi* and the *Daily Mirror*. It had been given to Bertrand de Jouvenel, the son of the late Henry de Jouvenel of Four-Power Pact fame – a young man with strong Fascist leanings, a youthful admiration for Hitlerian 'dynamics', and a great contempt for Geneva. 'The Leader of this Germany,' Hitler said to him, 'has nine-tenths of the people behind him. And this Leader is now saying to you: "let us be friends". . . . I know what you think. You are saying to yourself: "Hitler is offering us peace. But is he doing so in good faith? Is he sincere?" Now, think! Would it not be ruinous for both our countries if they clashed again on a new battlefield? . . . I want to show my people that the idea of eternal enmity between France and Germany is absurd; I want to show them that we are not hereditary enemies. The German people know it. The reconciliation between Germany and Poland was far more difficult. But they followed me. . . .'

Jouvenel then referred to the anxiety caused in France by *Mein Kampf* – it was the bible of the new Germany, he said, and it taught the German people that France must be annihilated. 'I was in prison when I wrote that book,' Hitler replied. 'French troops were occupying the Ruhr – but there is no reason to-day for continuing the conflict. . . . You don't really expect me to correct the book, like an author bringing out a second edition? I am not an author; I am a political leader. . . . If I succeed in bringing about a Franco-German *rapprochement* – that will be a correction worthy of me! All my foreign policy tends towards friendship with France.' And then came the usual tirade about Bolshevism as a world menace; and particularly a menace 'to certain countries' less immune against the poison than Germany. 'Don't you realise what you are doing? You are allowing yourselves to be dragged into the diplomatic game of a Power, whose only aim is to work havoc among the great European nations. . . . Russia is an explosive force, and her armaments are gigantic. As a German I must take account of such a situation. In the life of a nation there are decisive moments. To-day, if she wishes, France can put an end for all time to the "German menace".'

There was a clear warning to France not to ratify the Franco-Soviet Pact. It was said at the time that the Hitler interview was to have been published on the day of the final ratification debate; and that the publication was delayed at the insistence of the Quai d'Orsay.

The purpose of the interview was sufficiently clear; and it also contained the usual misstatements. Thus, the second part of *Mein Kampf* with the passage about France's 'annihilation', was not written in prison in 1923 (and anyway, it was a German and not a French prison) but in 1926, when the Briand–Stresemann idyll was at its height. The question whether Hitler would accept collective security was not answered; Bertrand de Jouvenel failed, indeed, to ask it.

The interview made a certain impression on the man-in-the-street in Paris; and one or two members of the Right even claimed that Hitler had at last provided the Right with 'a splendid election platform'. They little knew what was in store.

It was the French Government who decided to ask Hitler the questions that Jouvenel had failed to ask – and that was, on what terms he was offering France Germany's friendship. The Press of the Left, though critical to the interview, was almost unanimous in saying: 'Let's speak to him – let's ask him what he wants.'

On the British side serious efforts were also being made during that first week in March to bring Hitler to a round-table conference. In both French and British diplomatic quarters it was clearly indicated that their governments were prepared to discuss colonies, and a peaceful revision of Locarno, if only Germany would come and talk.

That was the week in the course of which the League Council, taking up the question of the oil embargo once again, sent an appeal to Italy to consider a new offer. The French had insisted upon this appeal being made before any final decision was taken; but they felt intensely worried lest Italy rejected it. An ever-recurring theme in the French Press – including the anti-League Press – was that France was now bound to follow Britain to the bitter end; only was France sure that Britain would support her with the same loyalty in case Germany violated Locarno?

While the Powers were waiting for the Italian reply, and while the French were becoming more and more worried, the news came from Germany that Hitler had called the Reichstag for the following day, and that a repudiation of Locarno and an occupation of the demilitarised Rhineland zone were to be expected.

. . . . . .

The demilitarised Rhineland zone was not a unique phenomenon. Many international treaties of the past had provided for 'demilitarised zones'. The .Treaty of Vienna provided for a small French demilitarised zone north of Basle; and Savoy had been demilitarised for years – and both these treaty provisions were observed by the French. So demilitarised zones do not necessarily mean 'national humiliation'.

The demilitarised Rhineland zone, which comprised the left bank of the Rhine and a fifty-kilometre strip of the right bank, and which included such centres as Aix la Chapelle, Cologne, Trier, Frankfort, the great armament city of Essen

and – since 1935 – the Saar territory, had a distant origin. French and German military authorities have always agreed that the Rhine is the 'natural and military' frontier of France and Germany. Field-Marshal von Moltke spoke of the 'extraordinary solidity' of the Rhine frontier, which rendered Germany almost invulnerable. As for the German territory on the left bank of the Rhine, it was always considered by the French as the springboard of German invasion. Nothing separates it physically from France.

When Germany was defeated in 1918 the question of 'neutralising' the Rhine and of preventing another German invasion was foremost in the minds of French statesmen and military experts. As early as November 27, 1918, Marshal Foch presented a memorandum to Clemenceau in which he wrote:

> 'Henceforth the Rhine must become the Western military frontier of Germany; Germany must be deprived of all political and military claims on the left bank of the Rhine – she must, in short, be deprived of all the facilities for rapidly invading (as she did in 1914) Belgium, France and Luxembourg, and for reaching the North Sea coast, and so threatening England. . . . In view of the moral and material situation of Germany, and in view of her numerical superiority over the democratic States of Western Europe, this is an indispensable guarantee for the maintenance of peace.'

Foch advocated the creation of a buffer State on the German left bank of the Rhine under permanent inter-allied occupation.

The Foch memorandum became the basis of a number of French Notes addressed in the course of the following months to the British and Americans. Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Philip Kerr (now Lord Lothian), while admitting the justice of France's aims, disagreed with the method she proposed. They could not agree with the French argument that the German left bank 'could easily become another Belgium' (that is, a new State with a national consciousness of its own); they felt that the establishment of such a State would create insuperable technical difficulties, exasperate German nationalism, and create a pro-German movement in England. Nor were they prepared to commit Britain to a share in the 'per-

manent' occupation of the buffer territory – though Clemenceau explained that 'one British flag was all he wanted', and that the French would take care of the rest. The British proposed a number of alternatives.

On March 14, 1919, President Wilson returned to Paris, and during a two-hour interview Clemenceau explained to him once again the French point of view and raised objections to the alternatives proposed by the British.

'Invaded and bled white, France is again facing Germany all alone,' he said. 'We do not want new territories. We only want a guarantee against another invasion. The guarantees that are offered us [by the British], such as the disarmament of Germany, the demilitarisation of the Rhineland, the League of Nations, and so on, are insufficient in their present form. What we need is the occupation of the left bank and of the bridges. This occupation must be inter-allied.'[1]

The British and American counter proposal was sensational – 'an unprecedented proposal of vast importance,' M. Tardieu, Clemenceau's henchman wrote. It was none other than the offer of a pact promising France immediate military help against all unprovoked aggression on the part of Germany. In exchange the French were to abandon all ideas of an independent Rhineland under permanent inter-allied occupation.

As everybody knows, the pact of guarantee was subsequently rejected by the United States and, as a result, the British guarantee also came to nothing.

But between March 1919, and the following June, when the Versailles Treaty was signed, the French Government took this Anglo-American Pact for granted, and, while refusing to abandon altogether their idea of a Rhineland occupation, they agreed to its being limited to fifteen years as a guarantee that Germany would carry out her obligations under the Peace Treaty. In addition to the fifteen-year occupation the Allies agreed on the necessity of demilitarising the Rhineland zone, which was to comprise not only the left bank but also a fifty-kilometre strip of the right bank. Demilitarisation means no fortifications, either old or new; no troops of any kind; and no facilities for mobilisation. These provisions are contained in

[1] Tardieu, *La Paix*–Paris 1921.

Articles Forty-two, Forty-three and Forty-four of the Treaty of Versailles.

As already said, the Anglo-American guarantee came to nothing, and in the years that followed the only 'guarantee' left to France was the fifteen years' occupation of the Rhineland. It was no solution to the tremendous Rhine problem that had haunted the minds of French statesmen from Richelieu downwards. The great opportunity had been missed and France had been 'let down'. The French did not share Mr. Lloyd George's view that Germany was 'out' for at least sixty years. It was this feeling of grievance and disappointment that explains the last desperate attempts made by the French to recover lost ground 'while there was still time', such as the Ruhr occupation and the encouragement they gave to the Rhineland Separatists – an abortive movement that they themselves had largely created.

In 1925 came Locarno. The Poincarists and Clemencists were disappointed, and said it would prove as worthless as the old Anglo-American guarantee; but the bulk of French opinion, led by Briand, welcomed it. After all, Locarno had the advantage of at last 'placing something' between France and Germany. It was not the ideal military solution to the Rhine problem, but it was a solution, both military and political.

The Germans were even more pleased with it than the French. 'We obtained at Locarno one hundred per cent of what we desired,' Stresemann wrote. And, alluding to France's attempts to detach the Rhineland by fostering and encouraging the Separatist movement, Stresemann added:

> 'There is one fact which the critics of our policy must admit, and that is that the Rhineland is now immune against any French infringements. As we could not protect it by force of arms, we have had it guaranteed by a treaty signed by England. The security of the Rhineland was our fundamental object in signing Locarno.... It preserves the Rhineland for us and allows us to recuperate the German territories in the East.'

It was automatic alliances that Stresemann feared most; and he was not greatly embarrassed by any 'League' treaty, such as the Franco-Polish or Franco-Czech Locarno agreements.

The great mistake that Germany made in 1914, he wrote, was to be *too obviously* the aggressor. This time she must be careful to recuperate the territories in the East by camouflaging aggression – so that the League would not condemn her.

In his speech on May 21, 1935, Hitler himself made the first official reference to a possible revision of Locarno: 'The German Government,' he said, 'intend not to sign any treaty which seems to them incapable of fulfilment; but they will scrupulously observe any treaty voluntarily concluded, even if it was drawn up before their assumption of power and office. In particular, they will hold to and fulfil all obligations arising out of the Treaty of Locarno, so long as the other partners are ready to stand by this treaty. The German Government regards the observance of the demilitarised zone as a contribution towards the appeasement of Europe of an unheard-of hardness to a sovereign state.'

He also regretted that the Franco-Soviet Pact had introduced 'an element of legal insecurity into the one clear and really valuable mutual assistance pact in Europe – the Locarno Treaty. The German Government would be particularly grateful for an authentic interpretation.' The 'authentic interpretation' was given, as already said, by the French, British and Italian Governments and jurists, who denied the incompatibility of the two treaties. But Hitler's reference to the 'unheard-of hardness' of the zone – even though he recognised it to be 'a contribution to the appeasement of Europe' – struck a new note.

The French reply to this was, roughly, as follows:

'The demilitarised zone forms part of the system of Western security which was embodied in the Locarno Treaty, and it was freely agreed to by Germany as a contribution to the international goodwill that the word 'Locarno' implies.

'The purpose of the demilitarised zone, was not to create a permanent state of inequality between Germany and France but, on the contrary, to reduce to some extent the inequality existing between a nation of 65,000,000 people and a nation of 40,000,000 particularly exposed to attack. If Stresemann welcomed Locarno in 1925, it was only because during the years that followed the War Germany was, as a rare exception,

weaker than France. Now that she is stronger again, she is no longer as interested in Locarno as she was then, and is beginning to treat the demilitarised zone as a piece of "Locarno eye-wash" which she can well afford to dispense with. It is France now, and not Germany, who needs Locarno most, as well as the demilitarised zone. If the zone were abolished Germany's military superiority over France, France's vulnerability, and consequently Britain's risks as guarantor power would all be enormously increased. If Germany could bring heavy artillery to the frontier, the value of the French fortifications would be reduced.'

There was, of course, also the German argument that if France built fortifications there was no reason why Germany should not build fortifications as well.

There were a number of French answers to this. 'If the demilitarised zone is France's first line of defence, the fortifications are her second line of defence, both necessitated by the difference in the strength of French and German effectives. The zone, as Herr Hitler himself admits, is a contribution to the appeasement of Europe.

'Secondly, is it conceivable that France, with her inferior effectives, would attack Germany and so violate Locarno and bring England in on the German side? Certainly not. The Germans know this perfectly well, and if they are in a hurry to build fortifications in spite of their cost and in spite of the absence of any risk of a French attack, it means that they are "up to something".

'France will never attack Germany, but with one possible exception, and that is if the League allows her to do so after an attack by Germany on her Eastern neighbours. With a demilitarised zone it may still be possible for France and the other League powers to threaten Germany with military reprisals if she is guilty of aggression in the East. If, on the contrary, Germany builds fortifications along the French frontier such League reprisals will be rendered enormously difficult. There is aviation; but aviation is not the decisive weapon. In the view of France, Germany's anxiety to build fortifications in the West springs from her desire to attack her Eastern neighbours with the maximum of impunity. It is therefore in the interests of European peace that the demilitarised zone

should not be abolished; for if it were it would facilitate Germany's aggressive designs both in the West and in the East, whichever she prefers.'

. . . . . .

I was in the rue Royale, at the Madeleine, about eleven o'clock on the 7th of March. *Paris-Midi* had just come out, and the kiosks were taken by storm. In great agitation people read the vast headlines:' LES TROUPES ALLEMANDES ENTRENT EN RHÉNANIE.' There was great consternation. *'Alors, c'est la guerre?' 'C'est la mobilisation?'* By a natural reflex, people looked at the sky, wondering if 'something' would not suddenly appear. *'Et que fera l'Angleterre?'* That was the first, or rather the second reaction; – the first was 'War?'. I was soon able to tell the French what *l'Angleterre* would do about it. At the British Embassy they shrugged their shoulders. 'No, you won't move England because the Germans have marched into – Germany.' And the 'British reaction' was illustrated by the pleasant little incident that had happened that very morning. Mr. —— was dictating a dispatch to the typist: 'The German troops have entered Cologne.' 'Cologne?' said the typist. 'But I thought Cologne was in Germany.'

After lunch I went to the Chamber; it was a Saturday, but the lobby was crowded with deputies and journalists. *'Qu'en pensez vous?'* I asked. Reply: *'Et les Anglais?'* It did not matter what *they* thought; what mattered was what the English thought. 'Well, there's one thing to be thankful for,' young Piétri said, 'and that is that Laval would not let us quarrel with Italy. A nice mess we should have been in.'

'Are you going to mobilise?'

Young Alfred Silbert, just back from the Croix de Feu headquarters: 'Our young fellows are in an excellent frame of mind. It's the same with the Communists – I've just seen some. Everybody's ready to march – if it has to be done.'

M. Montagnon, Neo-Socialist deputy: 'No, I don't think we'll mobilise. We may be more easily beaten in two years' time – but, after all, it means two extra years of life; and something may turn up in the meantime. *Est-ce qu'on sait jamais?'*

Even so, it was a terrible shock. It brought war much

nearer. It was a blow to all the security planning; apart from being a direct threat to France. *'Les troupes allemandes entrent en Rhénanie'* was not, from the French point of view 'Germans marching into Germany' – it was the capture of France's first line of defence. There was the Maginot Line behind – God bless Maginot – but how long would the Maginot Line hold out against heavy guns?

The Cabinet and the Generals met that afternoon. Mandel, Clemenceau's realistic disciple, advocated immediate mobilisation. It was now or never. Hitler must be forced to withdraw his troops; it might mean the end of the Hitler régime. It was not even necessary to march into the Rhineland. Sarraut and Delbos and several of the other Ministers were in favour of some kind of prompt reaction that would make the world, and particularly England, sit up. England might back the French, and force Hitler to withdraw his troops, with the French army ready to march in. But they weren't quite sure.

General Gamelin was consulted. 'You can mobilise two classes, or else have a general mobilisation, but there's nothing in between,' he said. Two classes were useless and a general mobilisation was a tremendous adventure; and what if the government were not prepared to march into the Rhineland, and if Hitler were to call the bluff? How was the vast demobilisation to be explained away? It would be worse than useless upsetting the whole life of the country, unless one was prepared to make the great plunge. Besides, the General did not seem very confident. And some of the other ministers asked: 'What will England say? And what about the League? And where is the money to come from?' M. Flandin seemed particularly bewildered.

In the end it was decided to reinforce the frontier garrisons, to man the Maginot Line, to concentrate the air force near the frontier, and – to appeal to the League Council.[1]

That day, in Warsaw, the French Ambassador was informed that the Polish army would march if the French army

[1] I have no documentary evidence to support my account of what happened in the course of those government deliberations on March 7; and I have compiled it from the more reliable fragments of information, some given to me by the people directly concerned. I believe my account of what happened is roughly correct. Many of the stories told about those critical deliberations are obviously untrue.

marched. But the answer was 'No'. The last opportunity was lost.[1]

In the evening M. Flandin, with his arm in a sling, received the Press and announced solemnly that France had appealed to the League Council, and then proceeded to demonstrate the total unscrupulousness of Hitler's methods. It was not true, he said, that France had rejected all Germany's friendly advances, as Hitler had asserted in his Reichstag speech. Laval had made repeated advances to Germany. In November Hitler was asked to discuss the Western Air Pact. He replied that he would not discuss anything so long as the Abyssinian War was in progress. Flandin then disclosed the highly significant fact that on the day following the publication of the *Paris-Midi* interview the French Government instructed its Ambassador in Berlin to ask Hitler at once on what terms he proposed to re-establish Franco-German friendship. M. François-Poncet saw Hitler, who asked for a few days' reflection. At the same time he specially asked that the Ambassador's visit should not be made public, and then on Saturday morning the Ambassador was informed that the repudiation of Locarno was Germany's reply to the French question. This showed that Hitler had deliberately wished to conceal France's request for negotiations, so that he could attribute his repudiation of Locarno to the 'irresponsiveness of France'. Yet, had he agreed to negotiate, a compromise on the zone would no doubt have been reached.

Hitler did not attempt to negotiate, but preferred to tear up Locarno. Hitler's new proposals were rejected by the French Cabinet as 'unacceptable'; after the tearing up of Locarno, any other agreement, they thought, would, sooner or later, share the same fate. Secondly, his whole plan was built on the doctrine of a free hand in the East and on the separation of the East from the West.

Regarding Hitler's proposal for a French demilitarised zone, it was unacceptable on practical grounds – the Maginot

[1] There was another thing that had added to the hesitation of the French, – and that was the news that although the German army was still weaker than the combined Franco-Polish armies, Goering might, in a fit of recklessness, send over Paris the 2,000 aeroplanes he had assembled that day. Many of them were ramshackle old planes, and the stunt would have been suicidal for Germany; but still –

Line had been built at a heavy cost, and, obviously, could not be scrapped and rebuilt so many miles further back.

Moreover, the Hitler plan ignored from the outset the strategic inequality of France and Germany; and if his proposal sounded 'only fair' to most readers of English Sunday newspapers, it was grossly unfair to anyone who had studied the map and compared French and German effectives.

On the following day, M. Sarraut, in a broadcast, declared that France would not negotiate under threat of violence, and that she would not allow Strasbourg to be exposed to German guns.

It would have been all right if it had meant anything, but the phrase meant nothing. The German Press seized upon it – 'and what about Karlsruhe? and what about Freiburg? and what about –?'

On Monday Mr. Eden declared that Britain would abide by the Locarno Guarantee as far as France and Belgium were concerned. It was the least thing he could decently do.

And then there started the dismal comedy of the League Council meeting in London. Flandin threatened to leave London; on another occasion he burst into tears. It ended in a complete French *dégonflage*. No economic sanctions; no 'symbolic' evacuation – nothing. Indeed, why should there have been any such 'symbolic' gesture? In the majority of the British papers Hitler's 'generous offer' was welcomed with loud cries of approval. The majority of the British public did not understand or did not wish to understand the meaning of the Locarno coup. The 'Locarno spirit' – that British-made phrase – was not even mentioned. Hundreds of cranks rushed into print with their Letters to the Editor, raking up stories of the ill-treatment of British soldiers *by the French population* during the War; the Ruhr was raked up (but never Belgium or concentration camps); George Robey recalled the horror of the black troops on German soil; France was the villain, and Hitler the hero of the Locarno coup; others announced sanctimoniously that they had always been opposed to Locarno; and would not have England committed to 'anything beyond the League Covenant' (as if the League Covenant was not a vastly greater 'commitment' than Locarno); and we were also told that 'seventy per cent of Clubland is

definitely pro-German'. Here and there, a few sane voices ventured to ask timidly 'whether we were not throwing in our weight on the wrong side'; but Winston Churchill, Sir Walter Citrine, the Duchess of Atholl, the *Yorkshire Post*, the Diplomatic correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, the writer of one 'Letter to the Editor' in five (if that) were like voices crying in the wilderness. General Smuts from South Africa joined in the Heil Hitler chorus.

It did not matter if Gauleiter Wagner, speaking at the Munich election meeting on March 14, just before Hitler's arrival there, declared: 'We have not broken any treaties. But even if we have, we deny others the right to condemn us. What Hitler declares to be right is and will remain right for all time. What Hitler did on March 7, benefited the German people. Anything that benefits the German people is right; anything that harms the German people is wrong.'

And, indeed, Herr Wagner's juridical theories received at that same meeting the full support of Hitler himself: 'Germany has no intention of being dragged round any international courts [as Flandin had proposed]; for no international court has the same responsibility towards the German people as I have.'

That was the spirit in which he was proposing to return to the League of Nations!

And so Germany got away with it. The League, built on the principle that treaties must be observed, became a byword of futility. With the blessing of the majority of 'British public opinion' (as reflected in the 'Letters to the Editor') Europe entered, in March 1936, into a jungle of lawlessness.

And France, who had sought strength and security in scraps of paper called 'Pacts', became, as a Croix de Feu man remarked to me one day, a second-class power. For after the destruction of Locarno, the most gilt-edged of all the scraps of paper, the value of all international treaties slumped heavily. The League Covenant more even than the rest.

Mr. Eden said nothing more about the oil embargo.

The law of the jungle – or the pigsty was taking the place of international law.

Recht ist was Deutschland nützt.

Saltykov, the great Russian satirist, once wrote a Dialogue in a Pigsty between Truth and the Triumphant Pig:

Truth: Is it true, Pig, that you can read?
The Pig: Yes, Truth, I can read. Only I do not understand it the way it is written but the way I want to understand it.

Just one more point.

A few weeks later I had occasion to discuss the Locarno coup with a responsible public man in England. 'The French were bloody fools,' he said. 'Their first thought was to ask our advice. Of course we couldn't give them "permission" to mobilise. If you want to kiss a girl you don't ask her permission. But if they *had* mobilised, without our permission, then we, with our genius for compromise, would have come forward with a beautiful compromise proposal. Hitler would have had to climb down – and think of the effect in Germany! – the Rhine frontier would have been saved, the League would have been put on its feet again, and England – good old England! – would have "saved European peace". For there would have been *no* war. The Germans were not ready to fight. We know that Hitler carried out his coup against the advice of the Reichswehr. The French should have known that England will always accept a well-managed *fait accompli*, whether it comes from Germany – or from France. Damned fools!'

Was it true? Or was it only a piece of after-wit?

CHAPTER XIV

THE ELECTION OF 1936 AND THE FRONT POPULAIRE PROGRAMME

THE French election campaign, which on May 3 – the day of the second ballot – was to result in the great victory of the Front Populaire and lead to the formation of the Blum Government three weeks later, opened in a rather subdued atmosphere. France was still under the impression of the Locarno coup, 'which had brought war so much nearer'; and this feeling of apprehension was shared by all parties.

Later, however, as polling day approached, these national apprehensions, common to all, receded somewhat into the background: for the Locarno coup, however serious in itself, was scarcely an election issue – except in Alsace and other frontier provinces, which felt the menace of a German invasion in a more personal way than the rest of France. In Alsace, as we shall see, 'Franco-German *rapprochement* at any price', and 'down with the Soviet Pact' were, clearly, election slogans; while in Lorraine, on the contrary, an important part of the population could not forgive the 'Left' Government of M. Sarraut its failure to march into the Rhineland on March 7.

But, apart from that, the principal election battle was fought for or against the Front Populaire and its programme. On the whole, it may be said that the entire 'programme' of the Right and Centre Parties consisted in their hostility to the Front Populaire, which they declared, 'must not pass', as it would mean civil strife, revolution, the fall of the franc, ruin, desolation, and war – the idea being that a weakened France would soon fall an easy victim to foreign aggression. The villainy, duplicity and hypocrisy of Moscow were loudly denounced. But the Right knew from the start – and Henri de Kerillis proclaimed it as early as February – that they were fighting a losing battle.

The anti-Front Populaire candidates were an incoherent

crowd of people, with little or nothing to unite them, except their opposition to the Front Populaire. They were the people who had supported wholeheartedly the governments of Doumergue and Laval; – and the record of these governments, with their economy decrees, and their fruitless policy of deflation, was not brilliant. Worse still, they represented, in the eyes of only too many voters, the 'spirit of the Sixth of February' – and did not even represent it effectively. The Croix de Feu, who might have given some 'dynamic' vigour to the election campaign of the Right, had decided not to run candidates (as De Kerillis had proposed); and declared that they would be simply the 'arbiters' in the election; – a role in which they were to fail utterly and completely.

This 'arbitration' simply consisted in helping to keep the 'internationalist' candidate out. La Rocque also claimed that the Croix de Feu were equally hostile to the *bien pensants* – the rusty reactionaries; – but that was simply part of the usual Croix de Feu demagogy: '*Nous sommes des sociaux parmi les sociaux.*' The 'arbitration' that the Croix de Feu were to carry out in the 616 constituencies of France was defined as follows by Colonel de la Rocque (*Le Flambeau,* April 25, 1936):

> 'The ardent and radiant mass of Croix de Feu men will apply themselves to the task with unanimous drive and enthusiasm. Leaving aside all personal considerations they will make every effort to disintegrate the Front Populaire and to isolate the internationalists (i.e. the Socialists and Communists). The Croix de Feu will cast aside the conservative defenders of immobility, as well as those standing for disorder. They will stimulate the germination (*sic*) of the seeds of reconciliation that have already been cast throughout the country.
>
> 'This arbitration will only be a prelude. One cannot pass overnight from confusion to harmony. The Croix de Feu movement is only three years old – in February 1934, we were only 30,000! We shall keep vigil so that the election of 1936 does not throw France into a state of mutiny and decay – which would be inevitable but for our great work of French Revival. Having thus avoided the worst, and in a clearer atmosphere, all men of good faith, and wherever they may come from, will recognise each other. The marvellous discovery of that fraternity will affirm itself around us. And there shall then be the great arbitration which will cast aside all the harmful causes; and will destroy and remedy their effects. Discord in the midst

of Disorder will give way to Union in the midst of Order; and that will be the hour of that national reconciliation whose birth will have been protected by the Croix de Feu movement in the midst of so many dangers. Thus, without ever having thought of serving ourselves, we will have led France back to the path of her true destiny.... After the election, a Croix de Feu hearth will shine and radiate in every town, in every village, in every house of the national territory.'

That was the well-meaning sort of gibberish that Colonel de la Rocque wrote at the time of the election campaign. Compared with this, even the worst enemies of the Left had to admit that the Left had at least something constructive to propose.

The Front Populaire programme, which was adopted as an election programme by the Socialist, and most of the Radical and other Left-Wing candidates, and was supported as a 'minimum' by the Communist candidates as well, was first published in the Press on January 11, 1936. The preamble to the 'programme' said:

'The programme of the immediate demands that the Rassemblement Populaire publishes to-day is the result of a unanimous agreement between the ten organisations represented on the National Committee of the Rassemblement: *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, *Comité de vigilance des intellectuels anti-fascistes*, *Comité mondial contre le Fascisme et la guerre* (*Amsterdam-Pleyel*), *Mouvement d'action Combattante*, the Radical Party, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Socialist-Republican Union, the C.G.T., and the C.G.T.U. [the Communist Trade Union federation, which at that time had not yet formally amalgamated with the C.G.T.]. The programme is directly inspired by the watchwords of the 14th of July. These parties and organisations, representing millions of human beings who have sworn to remain united, in accordance with their oath, "to defend democratic freedom, to give bread to the workers, work to the young and a great human peace to the world," have together sought the practical means of a common, immediate and continuous action. This programme is voluntarily limited to measures that can be immediately applied. The National Committee wishes every party and organisation belonging to the Rassemblement Populaire to join in this common action without abandoning either their own principles, doctrines, or ultimate objectives....'

The measures contained in the programme are as follows:

I. DEFENCE OF FREEDOM

1. *A general amnesty.*
2. *Measures against the Fascist Leagues:*
   (*a*) The effective disarmament and dissolution of all semi-military formations, in accordance with the law [of January 11]. (*See p. 199.*)
   (*b*) The application of legal measures in the event of incitement to murder or any attempt against the safety of the State.
3. *Measures for the purification of public life,* particularly through prohibiting Members of Parliament from combining their parliamentary functions with certain other forms of activity. [This clause was largely dictated by the evils (such as 'interventions' by lawyer-politicians) shown up by the Oustric, Stavisky and other financial scandals.]
4. *The Press:*
   (*a*) The abolition of the laws and decrees restraining the freedom of opinion.
   (*b*) The reform of the Press by means of the following legislative measures:
      (*i*) Measures for the effective repression of libel and blackmail;
      (*ii*) The compulsory publication by newspapers of their financial resources [a measure inspired by the influence of foreign subsidies (e.g. Italian in 1935) on the Press and by the desire to show who is behind the various newspapers – thus the readers' definite knowledge that the *Temps* belongs to the Comité des Forges or the *Intransigeant* to a magnate in the grain trade, would detract much from the weight of their propaganda].
      (*iii*) Measures putting an end to the private monopoly of commercial advertising [a measure directed against Havas, which by virtually controlling all commercial advertising is in a position to bring pressure to bear on the policy of newspapers] and to the scandals of financial advertising; and preventing the formation of newspaper trusts.
   (*c*) The organisation by the State of wireless broadcasts with a view to assuring the accuracy of wireless news and the equality of the political and social organisations in relation to wireless.
5. *Trade Union Liberties:*
   (*a*) The application and respect of the freedom of trade association in all cases.
   (*b*) Recognition of women's right to work.
6. Various educational measures, such as the raising of the

school leaving age from thirteen to fourteen, and the 'perfect freedom of conscience' in the case of both teachers and pupils.

7. Colonies: Formation of a parliamentary committee of inquiry into the political, economic and moral situation of France's overseas territories, particularly French North Africa and Indo-China.

II. DEFENCE OF PEACE

The methods proposed are: International co-operation within the framework of the League, collective security through the definition of the aggressor and the automatic concerted application of sanctions in case of aggression. Constant efforts to 'pass from armed peace to disarmed peace', first by means of a limitation agreement and then by the general simultaneous and controlled reduction of armaments.

The nationalisation of war industries and the prohibition of the private trade in armaments. Repudiation of secret diplomacy and its replacement by international action. Encouragement to be given to public negotiations tending to bring back to Geneva the powers now outside the League, but without, in so doing, undermining the essential principles of the League of Nations, which are collective security and indivisible peace. [This proposal is obviously directed against various proposals – particularly British proposals – of the Londonderry school of thought, which would consist in taking sanctions out of the League Covenant, turning the League into a mere diplomatic meeting-place, and in bringing Germany into this 'new' (and henceforth meaningless) League.]

The programme further proposes 'a greater flexibility of the procedure provided by the Covenant for "the peaceful adjustment of treaties that have become dangerous to the peace of the world"', (i.e. an adjustment of Article Nineteen of the Covenant) and for 'the extension of the system of pacts open to all, particularly in Eastern Europe, after the model of the Franco-Soviet Pact'.

III. ECONOMIC DEMANDS

1. *Restoration of the Purchasing Power abolished or reduced by the Economic Crisis.*

A. *Against unemployment and the industrial crisis.*

(*a*) Establishment of a national unemployment fund.

(*b*) Reduction of the working week without reduction of the weekly wage. [It should be noted that the Front Populaire programme does *not* specify the forty-hour working week – one of the first measures to be passed by the Blum Government under the pressure of the

Great Strike movement. The forty-hour week figures in the C.G.T. plan, but not in the Front Populaire programme.]

(*c*) Improving the chances of the young by creating a system of adequate pensions for aged workers.

(*d*) The rigid execution of a public-works plan through the combined financial efforts of the State and the local authorities and investors.

B. *Against the agricultural and commercial crisis.*

(*a*) Revaluation of agricultural prices, combined with measures against speculation and the high cost of living, in order to reduce the divergence between wholesale and retail prices.

(*b*) The establishment of a Cereal Board (*Office du blé*) 'which will abolish the tribute exacted by the speculator from both the producer and the consumer'.

(*c*) Strengthening of agricultural co-operatives, and the delivery to farmers of fertilizers, etc. at cost price.

(*d*) Suspension of *saisies* and adjustment of debts.

C. Pending the total abolition of all the unjust measures contained in the decree laws [of the Laval Government] the most blatant measures of injustice must be immediately abolished.

2. *Against the skinning of investors. For a better organisation of credit.*

(*a*) Measures regulating the pursuit of banking as a profession. Measures regulating balance sheets of banks and joint-stock companies. Measures regulating the powers of directors of joint-stock companies.

(*b*) Retired Government Officials must not belong to the Board of Directors of Joint-Stock Companies.

(*c*) Credit and investment must no longer be dominated by the economic oligarchy. The Bank of France must cease to be a private concern. ['*Faire de la Banque de France la Banque de la France*' – 'The Bank of France' must become France's Bank.] The Regency Council must be abolished; the powers of the Governor must be increased and placed under the permanent control of a council composed of representatives of Parliament, of the government, and of the great forces of labour, and other forms of industrial, commercial and agricultural activity. The share capital must be transformed into debentures. . . .

IV. FINANCIAL PURIFICATION

Inquiry into war profits in connection with the nationalisation of the war industries.

Establishment of a War Pensions Fund. (The purpose of

this is to spread the burden more evenly over the years in which the pensions will be payable.)

A democratic reform of the tax system – a rapid progressive increase in the income tax on incomes over 75,000 francs a year; reorganisation of death duties; special taxes on virtual monopolies, but with the provision that these taxes shall have no effect on retail prices.

Measures against tax evasion (such as the 'fiscal identity card' in the case of bearer securities).

Control of the export of capital, and measures (including confiscation) against the concealment of assets abroad.

The items in the Front Populaire programme which played the most important part in the election campaign were the measures against the '200 families' and against the *marchands de canons* – the armaments manufacturers; the dissolution of the Fascist Leagues; the (albeit partial) abolition of the Laval economy decrees; and (in industrial constituencies) the full Trade Union rights and shorter working week.

Of the three Parties of the Front Populaire, the most spectacular campaign of all was conducted by the Communists. They used the pictorial poster more than any other party; – and they found that it paid. Their slogan was POUR UNE FRANCE LIBRE FORTE ET HEUREUSE. Moscow themes and Moscow terminology were carefully excluded from them; they breathed, if anything, the romantic revolutionary spirit of Paris, with reminiscences of the Great French Revolution, 1848, and all that. (Even the Commune was put aside as something suspect in the eyes of the bourgeois.) Rude's statue of the Marseillaise at Napoleon's Arc de Triomphe, was the subject of one of their dazzling tricolour compositions; they all but missed adopting to their own uses the Napoleonic myth of Béranger and the *Memorial de Sainte-Hélène*; and as for Joan of Arc, they started a discussion in the *Humanité* which tended to show that the peasant girl of Domrémy would have been much more in sympathy with the People's Front than with the Royalists, who had proclaimed her *la Sainte de la Patrie*, but whose forbears had betrayed her and burnt her alive. *'Liberté, liberté chérie!'* the Communist posters wailed. It was clever propaganda in its own way; but just a little surprising, coming as it did from the Communists. It tended to reconcile the revolutionary spirit with the national spirit;

it touched the sentimental strain of *quarante-huitard* revolutionism dormant in many a Parisian's heart – be he a workman or a little bourgeois. Many a French patriot, feeling that the Communists had put something 'dynamic' into the somewhat moth-eaten *jacobinism* of the Radicals, was tempted to vote for them. Needless to say, the enemies of the Communists explained only too readily that all this sublime poster sentiment about *notre grande révolution*, and the soldiers of Valmy, as well as Maurice Thorez's election broadcast, with his brotherly appeal to the rank and file Croix de Feu 'who feel and suffer all that we feel and suffer' were simply intended to serve the purposes of Moscow – which, with an eye on the balance of power in Europe, was only too glad to stir up French patriotism and militarism, and national solidarity.

Yet, whatever may have been the precise intentions of the Communist leaders, the rank and file were rather pleasantly impressed by this new slogan *'Pour une France libre, forte et heureuse'*, by the romantic recollections of not merely 1789, but of Valmy and the Marseillaise, and by such brilliant anti-Fascist propaganda as their picture of Hitler with a blood-stained knife (marked Krupp–Wendel) between his teeth – a replica of the old anti-Bolshevik poster – *le couteau entre les dents.*

I dare say, the more 'consciously proletarian' elements who, at public meeting still shouted *'les Soviets partout'*, and sang the Internationale rather than the Marseillaise, took this patriotic propaganda with a little grain of salt; and realised that the tricolour posters were largely intended for bourgeois consumption; but even so, it rather tickled their fancy.

In any case, this new Communist cult of *la patrie* and of freedom and democracy greatly increased the Communist poll. The very active part they had played in building up the Front Populaire, and the strong stand they had taken (ever since February 9) against 'Fascism' convinced many people who, until 1934 had regarded them as dangerous enemies of law and order and of 'everything French', that they were now the most 'dynamic' element in the anti-Fascist Front.

And as for those voters who sang the Internationale, and desired a Soviet republic, the Communist leaders told them,

as Thorez told the British public in his book *France To-day and the People's Front*:

> 'Only a minority of the French working-class now enters the fight with the resolute determination to establish Soviets in France. . . . That is why the setting up of Soviets cannot be the immediate aim. Nevertheless, the Communists must lead the majority of the people who are determined to repel Fascism. And in the course of this struggle they will be able to convince the masses of the necessity for a Soviet Republic in France.

The Communists made tremendous headway in the urban constituencies, and, above all, in Paris and the Paris suburbs, where the 'Fascist menace' had made itself felt more directly than in other parts of France.

. . . . . .

The following 'informal notes' will put the reader into direct contact with the people of provincial France – whose existence is only too often forgotten and ignored by Paris, and by the Paris newspapers. The notes were taken at a particularly critical moment in France's post-War history. They deal with ordinary people, not with classified voters.

CHAPTER XV

INFORMAL NOTES ON A TOUR THROUGH VARIOUS PARTS OF FRANCE IN APRIL 1936

Lens, April 5.

LENS, Bethune, Arras: these are place-names only too familiar to those who remember the War. The plain north of Arras is still haunted by memories of war. It is overlooked by Vimy Ridge, with its almost completed Canadian War memorial[1] standing out against the sky, and visible thirty or forty miles away. And yet, but for the cemeteries and the memorials and a few deliberately preserved traces of the War, one would scarcely know what this part of the country had seen and suffered. Smooth green fields stretch across the vast plain north of Arras almost as far as the eye can see; and at Lens the Black Country begins with its chimneys and mines and slagheaps.

Everything is brand-new here. Soon after Amiens the 'devastated regions' begin. At Albert there is an ugly brand-new church, built in Moorish style, with a large golden figure on top. But there is something moving about the very ugliness of the thing; it had to be built up in such a hurry after the War. Between Albert and Arras there are many guard's houses along the line, dated 1917 and 1919 – built while the War was in progress only a few miles away, or immediately after the War. Here at Lens, which was, as it were, the capital of No-Man's-Land, though nominally 'under German occupation until October 14, 1918', there is not a single pre-War house. The entire town was wiped out; though a few people managed to live here among the ruins right through the War. And to say that the French care less than the English for 'home'! A clean neat new station built in concrete; new churches, a new town hall, a large and ugly war memorial in the spacious boulevard lined with rickety-looking young trees.

[1] This was to be unveiled by King Edward on July 26.

Several hotels at the station, a crowded *brasserie*; *prix-fixe* lunches twelve francs, with fine *paté de porc*. Numerous Polish shop signs; *bureau dla naturalizacji* opposite the very station.

The mining country around here is the richest in France; and the mines, greatly modernised since the War, are working steadily. I was told in Paris that there would be some fierce fighting here between the Socialists and Communists (though both belong to the Front Populaire); but the election is hardly in progress yet, and the struggle between the Socialists and Communists, far from being savage, is for the present, as one of the Socialists told me to-day, *'tout à fait correct'*.

Lens and most of the country around it is Socialist. There are Socialist Mayors at Arras, Bethune, Lens and many of the other mining towns of Artois. Maybe the election will get hotter in a week or two; but for the present nobody seems to be greatly excited about it.

This afternoon I went to the town hall, with an awful war memorial in front of it. M. Maes, the Mayor, was out. But I was received by the stout, blackbearded vivacious *secrétaire de la Mairie*, who talked more like the proverbial Marius than like a sober northlander. He is a good Socialist – and gave me a brochure about all that the Socialist municipality had done to Lens since 1929. For all that, he is considered slightly suspect; for he goes to Mass and is even the local correspondent of a Catholic paper. He gave me a note to M. Sion, the general secretary of the Miners' Trade Union, with its headquarters in a brand-new building at the other end of the town. The miners seem to be more highly organised on trade union lines than most French trades.

M. Sion was himself a miner for twenty-one years, and was a War veteran, twice wounded at Verdun, and now an important person in the trade union and municipal world of the Pas de Calais – and also the Socialist candidate for Lens – Est. His opponent there is Comrade Thibaud, an official of the same trade union as himself (since the recent amalgamation of the C.G.T. and the Communist C.G.T.U.). 'But I am sure of getting in; for I have a greater pull with the people than any of the other candidates,' M. Sion said. The only two

other competitors were a reactionary, a lawyer from Arras, supported by the Croix de Feu, and a candidate calling himself an anarchist. The Croix de Feu, he said, were not strong at Lens; there were a few hundred shopkeepers who belonged to it, but all the meetings they held were strictly private; so afraid were they of the working-class people. Even when Colonel de la Rocque came to Lens some time ago, the meeting he held was not announced beforehand. 'Besides,' M. Sion said, 'the people who now call themselves Croix de Feu are just the old reactionaries – *les vieux réacs* – who have always been our enemies. They are not *really* Fascists, you know.'

Lens is by no means a purely French town, for out of its population of 33,000, 7,000 are foreigners, including 5,000 Polish miners and their families, and several hundred Belgians, Jugoslavs, Czechs, Italians and Hungarians, nearly all miners.

'No one is more internationalist than miners,' M. Sion said. 'They are all comrades regardless of nationality; and in spite of unemployment, the French miners are opposed to the repatriation that has been going on.'

He took me to the 'foreign section' of the trade-union headquarters, where I found a short and stout little man with horn-rimmed glasses typing some long report in a feverish hurry. This was M. Hordis, the trade union secretary of the Polish miners; he claimed, in his peculiar French, to be 'the busiest man in the whole of France'. 'Lord, what a job this is,' he cried. 'Naturalisation, repatriation, every darned thing has to go through my hands! In the last three years twenty per cent of the Polish miners have been repatriated. At the owner's expense, of course; – one thousand from Lens and four thousand for the whole of the Pas-de-Calais, not counting their families. It's no fun going back to Poland where there's nothing for the men to do. The French trade unions are very decent about it; but while the crisis continues, the repatriation can't be completely stopped. But there's a marvellous working-class solidarity among all the miners.' M. Hordis said that many of the Poles were married to Frenchwomen, and that he was making every effort to get as many as possible naturalised. 'What a job it is going through all the red tape in Paris! But

I get things done! When everything else fails I go straight to the Minister of the Interior. Everybody in Paris knows what a plague Hordis can be!'

I asked how the Poles had got here in the first place. I learned that most of them had worked in Westphalia; and had migrated to France during the hard days of the Ruhr occupation. Many of them spoke German better than Polish. There were 15,000 Polish miners in the Pas-de-Calais alone.

Lens, April 6.

Met this morning in the café next to the trade-union headquarters some of Hordis's pals. One of the Poles there was once a Socialist deputy to the first Polish Diet, who had subsequently fled from Poland, had become a miner at Bethune, and had lately set up as a baker at Lens. Another chap in the café was a fat and talkative old Frenchman, editor of the local trade-union paper; a great admirer of Jacques Duboin's economic theories – 'People starving in a world of plenty'. He made a long harangue about it.

In this part of the country where memories of war are still fresh, people do not like to talk about the 'next war'. But beneath the surface of provincial calm, there is, and has been, especially since March 7, a real undercurrent of anxiety. Last month there was something of a run on the savings banks, and shopkeepers will tell you that business has dropped considerably within the last four weeks, with people, not knowing what will happen, putting their money aside and frightened to spend it. One of the shopkeepers I talked to to-day (he also is a friend of Sion's) is a Croix de Feu man – though why, nobody can say – least of all himself. He was always a Conservative and flatly denies that the Croix de Feu men are Fascists. 'We are good republicans,' he said, 'but we stand for better government.' He attends Croix de Feu meetings – which are, indirectly, meetings of the Conservative candidate – but that's about all. There must be lots of such 'Fascists' among La Rocque's 800,000 members.

The Socialists tell me that the capitalists and the Church support the Croix de Feu, just as they always supported the reactionary parties – 'always the same people with a different label'. To the ordinary workmen the Croix de Feu – whether

properly 'Fascist' or not – represent a reactionary and 'capitalist' party, and few, if any of them, join them.

Lillers, April 7.

Yesterday afternoon I took a bus to Bethune, which was under 'British occupation' during most of the War. A café proprietor, a Croix de Feu man himself, told me that there had been a most 'impressive' Croix de Feu meeting at Bethune the night before. But apart from that, there was little evidence of political activity in the town. Here and there, there were some Socialist and Communist election posters, in which both parties claimed to be the true defenders of peace.

The posters said that the people who wanted war were the *marchands de canons* and, by implication, the capitalists in general. There was also a good Communist poster of the graves and ossuary of Douaumont at Verdun, with words to the effect that the Communists would prevent 'this' from happening again. At Bruay, an important mining village, I saw the Socialist Mayor who said that the German *coup* of March 7 had been 'specially arranged between Hitler and the French reactionaries, with a view to preventing a "Left" election in France. But for Hitler,' he said, 'the Left would win a tremendous victory, but the bourgeois papers – which are the only papers read in the villages – exaggerate the menace, and some of the village people think that the Right can come to terms with Hitler, and so save us from war.'

I went on by bus to Divion, another mining town, where a Socialist election meeting was taking place. Curious how in this part of the country everybody speaks of Socialists, Communists and Croix de Feu – as if all the parties of the Right and Centre were identified with the Croix de Feu.

I met an old miner at a café kept by a jolly and amiable young woman with several small children. 'We were behind the lines here,' she said, '*on était sous les anglais.*' The old miner with a greasy cap and a long drooping moustache was something of a character. Very deaf, and very *méfiant* at first. But after a drink or two he consented to talk. He was now living on his pension. But he had started working in the pit at the age of thirteen. He used to work twelve hours a day for one franc. 'Something like Zola's *Germinal,*' I suggested.

He appreciated the reference. '*Germinal*—yes, a very great book. It was exactly like that in *my* young days.' He took me down to the Mairie, past the war memorial depicting a *poilu* grabbing his chest and an angel dropping a wreath on his head, and went on talking about the old mining days. In spite of it all, they had for him something of the distant glamour of youth.

The Socialist meeting was held in the dingy hall of the Mairie at the foot of the hill. The building was pre-War, and the hall was decorated with a faded picture of the Republic and a dirty bust of Jaurès. The speaker was the local Socialist deputy, and his audience consisted entirely of miners, who listened in complete silence to his reasons for standing again and to his long account of what the Socialist Party had done since the last election. The only heckler was a drunken man, who was promptly thrown out by the police commissioner. The candidate was a back-bencher if ever there was one. With his long moustache and red nose, he recited his lesson in a perfectly monotonous voice, jokes and all. His remarks about the cowardice of Daladier, who hadn't had the guts to proclaim martial law after the Sixth of February; his explanation that Blum was wrongly supposed to be weak and effeminate, and his joke about Doumergue who, as a young married man of seventy-two, *avait des idées sur le redressement*, did not differ by half a tone. I did not stay till the end.

At the café, near the bus stop, I found two miners, who had not even troubled to go to the meeting. One was a silent melancholy man, the other a cheerful fellow with a turned-up nose, both grimy with coal-dust. Pierrot did not think much of the Socialist candidate who, 'anyway', was a big farmer with pots of money, and with a son who was a wholesale liqueur dealer. He had started work in the mine at thirteen, just before the War, and had gone on working right through the War, when the mines were more active than ever. 'We were under the British then.' Like most miners, he worked only five days a week, and grumbled about the seven-hour day not having been introduced in the French mines. His wife had died three years ago, and he lived all alone in the five-room cottage belonging to the mining company and grew vegetables in his garden. He paid only seven francs 'rent' a month and

had free coal. He earned on the average thirty-four francs a day, and did not seem to be unhappy, though he had naturally a grudge against the employers who, together with the curé, were supporting the reactionaries. 'The whole lower part of this town,' he said, 'is under the curé's thumb.' Pierrot spoke with a resigned air about war and said, almost reassuringly, that it would not come at once, but in four or five months. Harlequin thought it would take a little longer than that.

The only bus I could find to get out of Divion last night took me to Lillers, on the main Dunkerque-Arras line. This is a prosperous little town, manufacturing mainly boots, with Flemish architecture, and a main square not unlike the reconstruction of eighteenth-century Brussels at last year's Brussels exhibition. The hotel proprietor here is a fair-haired Englishman from Newcastle. He got married to a French girl during the War; had taken her to England; but last year he learned from her parents that the station hotel was for sale. 'It was in an awful mess,' he said, 'when we got here. But now look at it,' he said proudly. 'To-day we served forty lunches! They are queer chaps, the French are,' he said. 'They nearly had a fight in this hotel the other day, and since then the Left chaps and the Right chaps come here on different nights. It's not safe to have them together . . . and, Lor', don't they just love us. "*Sacrés anglais*" they say to me "will you or won't you come over in the next war?" '

Lens, April 9.

Thanks to buses and the *michelines*[1] it has become much easier to travel about provincial France than before, when you always had to depend on the slow local trains. The *micheline* took me back here from Lillers this morning, through the fields of sugar beet, and past the slagheaps. In the afternoon M. Hordis persuaded me to hire a car and to have a look at the battlefields. The driver, he said, was an excellent guide. The guide – a Pole into the bargain – was apparently half-witted. As a 'guide' he never said anything more than '*vous vi? vous vi?*'

We visited Notre-Dame-de-Lorette with its memorial chapel on the hill overlooking the vast plain and its immense French

[1] Railcars.

graveyard, with pathetic little framed photographs of bearded peasants attached to the crosses; and the beautiful British War Graves, with so many of their white tombstones bearing the simple words: 'A soldier of the Great War – known unto God'; and the German cemeteries with their black wooden crosses; and Vimy Ridge, with its carefully-preserved trenches and dug-outs, and fragments of decayed cloth still clinging to the cement bags, hard as stone, lining the trenches.

At Arras, which, unlike Lens, still contains a fair number of pre-War houses, I fell upon a talkative young gendarme in a café. He was attached to the Prefect of the Pas-de-Calais and was proud of having escorted President Lebrun and King Carol of Rumania on their return journey from King George's funeral. At Calais he had seen British battleships, and he thought the British navy the most marvellous in the world. 'There is no doubt about it,' he said, 'that Britain will come in on our side if there is another war. They cannot afford to let the Germans get hold of Calais; for London would be done for.' He then recalled the last war. 'I was quite a small boy during the War,' he said; 'and the British officers had their mess in our house; they left behind them fifty gramophone records – all in English. I sometimes still play them.'

On our way back to Lens we stopped at Liéven, a modern mining town with a Communist municipality and an imposing new town hall. Comrade Thibaud, the Communist Mayor, was holding an election meeting at the school. There were some two hundred miners there, many women and children. He thundered against the Regents of the Bank of France and the '200 families'. He made no direct attack on the Socialists, or his Socialist competitor, but insinuated that the Communist Party was more 'forward'. The final aim of the Communists was the French Soviet Republic; for the U.S.S.R. was the only country where workers were happy and where Socialism worked perfectly. A resolution was passed unanimously:

Vive le Parti Communiste! Vive le Front Populaire!
Vive la France libre, forte et heureuse!

Montluçon, April 11.

This is the Bourbonnais, 'the sweetest part of France', as

Sterne calls it in his *Sentimental Journey*. How different from the Pas-de-Calais!

Montluçon, with a population of 42,000, is in the very heart of rural France; there is not a single big town nearer than Limoges and Clermont, both nearly a hundred miles away; and if you travelled south, you would reach the Mediterranean without seeing a single factory chimney. Montluçon itself is a rare phenomenon; an industrial town without any unemployed – very different in this respect from Limoges. It has a big factory of motor tyres, munition works and chemical works specialising in fertilizers. The workmen to whom I talked were complaining of a recent cut in wages; but considered themselves better off than their comrades in other towns. 'This is a cheap town,' one of them said; 'and I have just moved into a three-room flat, for my wife insisted on having a *salle à manger*. Women are queer – they insist on having a house at least as good as their neighbour's. Still, even with the new house, we manage to make ends meet.' He had one child and thought it was 'quite enough to go on with'.

This afternoon I went to see M. Dormoy,[1] the Socialist Mayor of the town. The Allier and the Creuse, next to it, are both Socialist. The two departments returned eleven Socialists between them in 1932, and only two Radicals, and now the Socialists hope to win even these two non-Socialist seats.[2] Both departments are overwhelmingly rural. M. Dormoy is an imposing man with a black beard, and is considered to be the 'big boss' of Montluçon – for although he is a Socialist, he owns a great deal of house property in the town. Rural Socialism, as I soon discovered, is something different from urban Socialism. It is neither revolutionary nor collectivist. I got my first glimpse of it at a small election meeting M. Dormoy held at the Mairie of Lignerolles, a small village five miles outside Montluçon.

I arrived there too early, and had time to have an omelette and cheese, and some very sour red wine at the *auberge*, all for five francs. The *patronne's* two children – healthy little brats – were finishing their evening meal of milk soup. *La*

[1] Later a member of the Blum Government, and, after the death of Salengro, Minister of the Interior.

[2] They succeeded in this.

patronne, like everybody else, had a great regard for M. Dormoy, and the people in the *auberge* were flattered by his visit. '*Pensez donc*, he has fifty-one communes to look after in his constituency. *Quelle corvée!*'

The hall of the little Mairie – which one could hardly distinguish from a farmhouse – was packed with farmers from the neighbourhood – strong and healthy fellows. And although they were flattered by the 'big man's' visit to their village, they listened to him with an obviously critical air, and not without some heckling. There was one old boy in particular who tried to get M. Dormoy to admit that the old Chamber would be called before the expiry of its mandate, and asked to vote a devaluation bill. But M. Dormoy would not admit it. '*Vous dites des sottises, mon ami.*'

His attacks on the '200 families', on the *Marchands de Canons* and on the Press 'paid by Hitler and Mussolini' were loudly cheered by the farmers. His speech was a rather colourless performance – the kind of speech one hears only too often at the Chamber. He declared himself opposed to devaluation; praised the Office du Blé; said that the present rise in wheat prices was due to the fact that the old stocks had practically been exhausted – and there was, therefore, no reason for thanking the government for it. He then gave them a long survey of the international situation – to which they listened with great attention. He attacked Laval, but also spoke with much bitterness of England who had 'let down' France on March 7.

There is no doubt the Locarno coup has caused much nervousness even in this remote part of France, so far away from the 'road of invasion'. But after all even the little village of Lignerolles has its war memorial.

The real fun at the meeting, however, was still to come. After completing his political speech M. Dormoy recalled all that he had done in the last four years for the commune of Lignerolles. He had secured a 10,000 francs subsidy for the water-works; two of the roads had been classified as 'national' roads, and henceforth the State and no longer the commune was responsible for their upkeep; and he had been promised an extension of the automatic telephone to Lignerolles. At this point the audience became extremely lively and even aggressive. Why, one of them asked, were the octroi (municipal

customs) duties on butter and vegetables so high at Montluçon? 'I am here as your Parliamentary candidate,' M. Dormoy replied, 'I am not here as Mayor of Montluçon.' But the farmers persisted. Why were the Montluçon hospitals buying their milk from one particular source and none of it at Lignerolles? And so on, and so on.

One realised what a dog's life a French deputy has to lead with his constituents bothering him all the year round with constant requests for little services and favours (and M. Dormoy had fifty-one communes to look after!). For to render such services is, in the eyes of most of his constituents, the main function of a deputy – even a Socialist deputy.

Rural Socialism is anything but collectivist. But it is, in a sense, anti-capitalist. The farmers hate the '200 families'; and if they vote for the Socialists, it is because they expect to be protected against the big trusts – the big milling concerns, and the manufacturers of fertilizers, which have risen out of all proportion with the price of wheat and farm produce.

As regards the Office du Blé, M. Dormoy told me that the farmers were favourable to it 'in principle', 'instability of prices being the farmers' worst enemy'. 'It is true,' he said, 'that the Right are trying to frighten them by conjuring up visions of the Office du Blé official going round the villages and taking stock of everything with an inquisitorial air. I dare say, they don't like any such inquisition; but many of them realise that it'll be all to the good.'

Guéret, Creuse, April 13.

No one in this part of the world is taking Fascism too seriously. To the people, who seldom see anybody who is not either a Socialist or a Radical, the Republic is eternal. The 'fussiness' of Paris is treated with a touch of contempt. During the last year the Croix de Feu have been 'studying' provincial France. It is hardly surprising that their study should have had a sobering influence upon them. The country – at least south of the Loire – is completely unprepared for any change of régime. The other night, in his speech at Lignerolles, M. Dormoy did not even trouble to discuss the 'Fascist menace'. No wonder that the pro-Fascist elements in France are finding the 'south of the Loire' heartbreaking.

The only evidence of Croix de Feu influence I have had these last few days was the proprietress of my Montluçon hotel, who thought that what France really needed was a Mussolini. But she did not think La Rocque quite the right man. Her Fascism did not, however, prevent her from speaking highly of M. Dormoy, the Socialist mayor. I also saw the Croix de Feu paper displayed in a few shop-windows, and on the train I met a youth wearing a Croix de Feu badge with a rather self-conscious air.

Guéret, with a population of only 8,000, is the principal town of the Creuse department, which is eighty-seven per cent rural. It is a quiet and slow part of France, and both trains and buses are scarce. Apart from its palatial, brand-new Mairie and some ugly new brick 'villas' near the station, Guéret is an old-fashioned little town, largely inhabited by rentiers and retired soldiers and government officials. Like the Allier, the country is mostly owned by small freeholders, and there are only three or four middle-sized estates in the district. Some of the peasant women come here to market in their donkey-carts – though many others come in their 'tin lizzies'.

During the slump last year the Agrarian Fascists (the now almost defunct Dorgères movement) called a meeting at Guéret. About three thousand peasants came to the meeting, but after listening in the market-place to the fiery speeches they went off to lunch without further ado. The present deputy for Guéret is a Radical, but he may lose his seat to the Socialist. The Communists are of no great importance here, and it is believed that some of the farm labourers will be their only supporters.

The Radical Mayor of the town, an old man with a drooping white moustache and looking a little like Clemenceau, who received me with old-fashioned courtesy, spoke with some melancholy of the progress the Socialists are making in rural France at the expense of the Radicals. 'It is rather paradoxical,' he said. 'It is simply due to the sentimental desire to go *toujours à gauche* – "a little more to the Left". For many of our Socialists are, in reality, more moderate than any Radical.' He expressed the view that Paris might still be the intellectual centre of France, but with its irresponsible fussiness it could

no longer be regarded as its political centre. 'The gulf between Paris and the provinces,' he said, 'has been steadily growing.' The Creuse, he continued, was a less wealthy country than the Allier, and the peasants were still rather hard hit, though they were naturally better off than last year. But to be perfectly content, they would need another ten per cent rise in prices. Still, the fact remained that deposits in the savings banks were steadily increasing in the Creuse – and that in spite of the great nervousness about Germany. He was not sure whether the peasants had given serious thought to the League of Nations and the right policy to be adopted. All he knew was that they wanted peace, peace, and peace.

I spent Easter Sunday at Evaux-les-Bains, in the Creuse, where I was regally entertained by the local baker, M. Maneyraud, who happens to be the son-in-law of old Thiebault, my Paris concierge. Evaux is a small watering-place, little known to the outer world, with a spring of evil-smelling water which is said to be good for rheumatism. Its Mayor is a wealthy retired Colonel – 'a reactionary', as the good Republicans of the town call him, 'who does the town no good, but no harm either'.

In the afternoon my host took me in his fifteen-year-old Citroën through the picturesque country around Evaux, with its orchards in blossom and its softly undulating hills. We also saw some comparatively wild country along the steep banks of the river Tarde, and visited the beautiful twelfth-century church of Chambon. The evening we spent in the local café at Evaux in the company of the leading Republicans of the town – my host, the tailor, and the postman, besides two young men from a neighbouring village who listened with great respect to their speeches. The tailor, a young man of about thirty-two, was a passionate Republican, who had wept with rage when Daladier allowed himself to be driven out of power by the February riots. 'But in those days,' he said, 'provincial France was taken by surprise. Now we have been warned. If the Fascists start any nonsense again,' he cried, thumping the marble table with his fist, 'provincial France will march on Paris like one man.'

He and the postman and my friend the baker all proclaimed their passionate devotion to the Republic and to the League of Nations. They were surprisingly firm on this point, and held

that collective security alone could save France from war. They thought highly of the last French memorandum,[1] and they all hated Laval, to whom they referred as Spada, the name of the famous Corsican bandit. They also denounced with much violence the '200 families' and the armaments manufacturers, and were enthusiastic readers of Bergery's *Flèche* and of the *Canard Enchainé*, the satirical Left-Wing weekly, whose influence in the district they declared to be 'tremendous'. Things would soon change, they said, once the Front Populaire got into power. They cheerfully prophesied that M. Lamoureux, one of the Right-Wing Radicals, with 'National Government' tendencies, who is a candidate in the Allier, would be 'beaten to smithereens' by the Socialist candidate.[2]

And the postman, a little man with a red moustache, declared that the Creuse was totally and completely Republican. 'The peasants round here are rather illiterate,' he said, 'and they get the schoolmaster to write their letters for them. They treat him as the great authority on everything. So he has them well under his thumb. He is, of course, a passionate Republican. You cannot imagine how much the schoolmasters have done for the Republic. Needless to say,' the postman added, 'I never fail to do my little bit. When I take a letter or paper round to a farm I also slip in a few good words for the Republic.' The postman's name was M. Laval, the cause of much good-natured ragging in the village. He was introduced to me as 'M. Laval, but a decent chap for all that'. This M. Laval reminded me of the helpless rage with which a well-known reactionary writer recently spoke of the ubiquitous and pernicious influence of schoolmasters and postmen everywhere 'south of the Loire'.

Lyons, April 15.

Central Lyons is built on a narrow peninsula, shaped rather like Manhattan Island, between the river Rhône and the river Saône. Its northern part, high on a hill, is called Croix Rousse – the cradle of the Lyons silk industry, and a district noted in the past for its revolutionary temper. M. Herriot is

[1] The Flandin Memorandum in reply to Hitler's twenty-five points.
[2] So he was. But he was re-elected in the by-election in January 1937.

busy at present writing a book on the revolution at Lyons. All the public buildings, as well as the business and shopping district, are concentrated on this Manhattan Island of Lyons. It has many old monuments, including the famous baroque town hall, numerous statues and fountains, two wide promenades from east to west; and the little red tram-cars rattle noisily up and down the long narrow streets from north to south. There are handsome old houses belonging to the rich Lyonnais along the river-banks; and palatial buildings housing the various silk syndicates, chambers of commerce, and so on.

Numerous bridges connect the centre of Lyons with 'Old Lyons' on the other side of the Rhône, a district built on the steep slopes of a green hill, and dominated by the famous Basilica of Fourvière. It is called the Colline Mystique, and its people, as distinct from the 'revolutionaries' of Croix Rousse, are conservative and religious in temperament – which does not prevent many of them from voting for M. Février, their Socialist deputy.

On the other side of the Saône is a vast working-class district, with only the skyscrapers of the 'urban centre' of Villeurbanne to break the drab monotony. This Communist municipality has produced the most spectacular piece of town-planning in France – a mass of workmen's flats eleven to eighteen storeys high, with a modern town hall in the centre surmounted by a three-hundred-foot tower. Its central avenue is called Avenue Henri Barbusse. In spite of all this apparent splendour, unemployment is even worse in this part of the town, with its metallurgical and chemical works, than in Lyons proper.

Lyons is a depressed town. In 1935 the output of silk was the smallest ever recorded – less than half the output of 1913, and less than one-fifth of that of 1928. The value of the silk exports has dropped from 3,250,000,000 francs in 1928 to 540,000,000 in 1935 – a fall of eighty-three per cent. It is true that rayon, the despised parvenu competitor of silk, is now holding first place in the Lyons textile industry – in 1935 30,000,000 lb. of rayon were used as against 5,000,000 of silk; – but this has not been sufficient to restore the prosperity that Lyons knew only a few years ago.

This year's Lyons Fair – one of M. Herriot's numerous creations – had actually begun in a more promising manner than it had done for years, and would have given excellent results but for Hitler's Rhineland coup, which occurred right in the middle of it. Many buyers, on their way to Lyons, turned back, and numerous orders were cancelled.

No; Lyons, as everybody will tell you here, is not what it used to be. In the good old days the town was (according to French standards) fabulously rich. The silk magnates considered themselves as good as any aristocracy; and it was a town of exuberant eating and feasting. 'It made a big difference to the life of Lyons,' an old Lyonnais told me, 'having dozens of big buyers from abroad arriving here every day. Our silk people treated them royally to lunches and dinners and theatre shows, and it made the money go round. Our restaurants are the best in all the world, and the English loved coming to Lyons.'

Of the twelve Lyons constituencies eight are held by Radicals, two by Socialists and two by reactionaries; but Socialist influence at Lyons is stronger than the figures suggest; and a few years ago Herriot nearly lost the Mairie to the Socialists, and in the coming election it is by no means certain that Herriot will be elected in the first round.[1] There is much discontent in the town; and Herriot's position has been shaken. The Right are fundamentally hostile to him – for he broke up the Doumergue and the Laval Governments; and the Left are dissatisfied with him because he supported these governments and their policy of deflation for a long time. He is also known not to be a Front Populaire enthusiast.

Lyons and Herriot – the two names are inseparable. M. Herriot has been the Maire of Lyons for thirty-one years and is widely regarded as the greatest municipal administrator in France. His local efficiency is a matter of amazement to those who regard M. Herriot as a statesman with more failures than achievements to his credit, and who are apt to talk only too glibly of his weakness and 'sloppiness'. Even one of M. Herriot's political opponents whom I asked about it admitted that, although much of the planning at Lyons had been done

[1] He wasn't.

by other people, 'Herriot had an extraordinary flair for distinguishing between good plans and bad plans and for picking out only the good ones.' In his thirty-one years at the Mairie he has built schools and model hospitals and model slaughter-houses, and has done a thousand other things for Lyons. And he has managed, through his political influence, to get a lot of subsidies from the State. Lyons puts this to his credit.

I saw him last during the Hoare–Laval crisis, and he looked at that time extremely unhappy and perplexed. He was obviously in complete disagreement with M. Laval and was anxious to leave the government, which he did a few weeks later. He was also visibly distressed by the savage campaign that was set loose against him in the Right-Wing 'pro-Laval' Press and by the crop of letters that this campaign had produced – unsigned letters with threats to murder him. What happened some time later to M. Blum could easily have happened to him.

At the Town Hall at Lyons I gained access to the holy of holies – *le Cabinet du Maire* – without great difficulty. It was a sparsely furnished room – not in the least 'artistic' – with heavy claret-red velvet curtains on the windows, and a large antique mantelpiece with a bronze replica of Michelangelo's Tomb of the Medicis. Prominently displayed on a table was a signed photograph of President Roosevelt – a trophy of M. Herriot's trip to Washington in April 1933.

M. Herriot looked rather weary and a little sad. 'I continue to be,' he said, 'in the centre of a savage campaign, and I am getting rather tired of it all. Even here at Lyons my election meetings are rather wild at times.' What were the prospects after the elections? I asked. M. Herriot threw up one hand in a weary gesture of indifference. 'I don't know,' he said briefly. 'And the Front Populaire?' I asked. He shrugged his shoulders. *'Que voulez vous mon petit, que je vous dise?'* He had obviously no great liking for the Socialists, least of all the Socialists at Lyons. He had no intention of entering any new government or of going to the Quai d'Orsay. 'I am getting old,' he said, 'and I want to stay quietly here and to take care of my Mairie at Lyons. I have supported the foreign policy of this government. But now I want to stay outside it all.'

'How,' I said, 'would you define the position of Lyons on the political map of France?'

M. Herriot reflected for a moment. 'Do you not know the saying,' he said, 'that "Paris is the capital of France, but Lyons is the capital of the Republic"? It is still true.'

He had two election meetings in his constituency that night, and offered to take me with him in his car if I came back in an hour.

M. Herriot is a great Parliamentary debater, but he is at his best at a small gathering. His personal charm, his humour, his friendly, familiar manner disarm even the most determined opponents. The first meeting was in a small café in a shabby working-class district. It was packed with little shopkeepers, workmen, and a few postmen and railwaymen. M. Herriot said he would not make a speech, but simply answer any questions the audience cared to put to him. 'I am not much of a novelty,' he said. 'And if you want somebody fresh and new you can do better than vote for me. But such as I am,' he smiled, 'I shall be glad to represent you again. I am getting old. I am like a bottle of wine. It's for you to say whether it is getting better or worse with age. I am not hankering after reactionary votes. I appeal only to democrats. I am now probably standing for the last time,' he said sadly. '*Eh, oui.* Time passes. I am nearly sixty-four.'

An unemployed man asked some question about the family allowances he was – or was not – receiving. M. Herriot dismissed the matter by telling him to come to the Mairie. Another young man asked how Fascism should be fought. M. Herriot was now in his element. 'Vote against it!' he cried. 'Vote against it. That's the first thing to do.' He then told the distressful story of the savage Fascist campaign against him. 'I have been threatened with death. I have been slandered and libelled. The first thing the new Chamber must do is to pass a new libel law. We have among us to-night an English journalist who knows how much it costs in his country to libel people.' 'Monsieur le Président,' I said, 'it sometimes costs even *too* much.' 'Maybe,' Herriot smiled, 'but in France it costs nothing at all.' He was obviously feeling strongly on the subject.

There was an unemployed fellow with a broad grin, who,

after trying to pull M. Herriot's leg about various things, asked him what he thought of the Franco-Soviet Pact. 'Ah,' said M. Herriot, 'now *there* is a sensible question. I went to Russia for the first time in 1922, and I wrote a little book about it in which, I am proud to say, I spoke of the future friendship between our two countries. . . .'

'*Vive la Russie!*' the unemployed fellow cried. The audience chuckled and M. Herriot laughed. '*Eh, oui,*' he went on. 'In 1932 I went to Russia again, and I said to them –' There followed an account of how he had persuaded the Russians to 'drop Germany' and to drop the 'world revolution' – for 'peace was not solid enough to stand it', and to come to Geneva to organise European peace. And since they had come to Geneva the Russians had always been on France's side and their conduct had been irreproachable.

Amid loud cheers M. Herriot drove off to the other meeting. This also took place in a poor-looking café, with rows of bottles on the shelves and people sitting on the zinc counter. M. Herriot squeezed himself into a corner at the end of the long tables, and asked for a cup of coffee. In this café too, the audience was composed of little shopkeepers and workmen, with few well-dressed people among them.

One heckler was an exquisitely polite young man, who, 'in the name of sixty-nine newsvendors', wished to ask le citoyen Herriot why the sale of newspapers had been prohibited in the rue de la République on Saturday nights. M. Herriot recalled that the sale of certain Fascist papers by pugnacious propagandists had given rise last year to street clashes, and while he sympathised with the professional newsvendors – for to them it was a question affecting their livelihood – it was difficult to discriminate between different kinds of newspapers. 'But come and see me at the Mairie. Never in my thirty-one years at the Mairie have I refused to receive a delegation of workers.'

Some good fun was provided by a retired railwayman – old, doddering, and slightly tipsy – who persisted in asking M. Herriot why the Radicals had brought into power '*le fameux Doumergue,* the man of the decree laws, who had not even been elected by the people'. M. Herriot proceeded to explain at some length how the Doumergue Government was formed

after the February riots. But the old man continued to interrupt: 'The Radicals were no good. And they called for *le fameux Doumergue*. Now, I want to know why you had to bring back *le fameux Doumergue?*' By this time everybody was roaring with laughter, including M. Herriot himself. 'But the Radicals didn't bring him back,' he said. 'The President of the Republic brought him back.' 'No, it was you who brought him back,' the old man cried. 'And he was not even elected by the people.' He was visibly enjoying his own success. Still, after some further protests against *le fameux Doumergue*, he at last gave way.

M. Herriot spoke again of the slander and libel to which he had been subjected by the Reactionary Press, and explained why he had been forced to break up both the Doumergue Government and the Laval Government. Poincaré, he said, was loyal; 'but not these two.' He had disagreed with Laval's foreign policy, and, moreover, the attitude of the Reactionary Press had rendered their further co-operation impossible. 'When Laval went to Russia they all cried *"Bravo! Bravo! Vive Laval!"* Yet, when I attended a meeting organised by the Friends of the Soviet Union I was branded as a traitor and a Russian agent.'

There were loud cries of *'Vive Herriot!'* as he was leaving the café, and a young workman, pushing his way to *le Président's* car, assured him excitedly that 'all the young people of Lyons were behind him'.[1]

Strasbourg, April 19.

'We cannot allow Strasbourg to be exposed to the German guns,' M. Sarraut, the Premier, said on March 8, the day after Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland. The bridge of Kehl is only a mile away from Strasbourg, and, as Hitler has refused to make the required 'gesture', Strasbourg is, and will probably remain, exposed to the fire of German guns. There was

[1] They weren't really. In M. Herriot's constituency the Right candidate headed the poll in the first ballot. In the second ballot Herriot was returned, thanks to the spontaneous withdrawal in his favour of the Socialist and Communist candidates. Since he was no great supporter of the Front Populaire, it was a little awkward for him.

Many of the other Radicals at Lyons did even worse. In the old Chamber they held eight out of the twelve Lyons constituencies, the remaining four being equally divided between the Right and the Socialists. In the new Chamber Lyons is represented by four Right members, three Radicals, three Socialists and two Communists.

something of a panic here in the second week of March. The shops dealing in trunks and suitcases did – as one of their owners told me – some 'golden business' during those days, and there was a run on the banks and savings banks. In a few days several hundred million francs were withdrawn. But the people no longer consider war as an immediate probability, though here – as elsewhere in France – the danger of a German adventure in Austria is considered very real.

This morning Jean Knittel, the best-informed journalist in Alsace and most hospitable and most entertaining of hosts, took me in his car 'down the Maginot Line'. 'Take your passport,' he said, 'but for heaven's sake don't take a camera.' It was a perfect spring day as we drove north along the main road, three miles west of the Rhine, lined with pear-trees in full blossom. On the left were the wooded Vosges mountains, on the right, the dark-blue silhouette of the Black Forest. Looking back, we could see the high spire of Strasbourg cathedral. 'You know the passage in Heine,' Knittel said: ' "I should like to stand on the top of Strasbourg cathedral, and spread out a tricolour flag, large enough to cover the whole of Germany!" '

We passed through the hop country north of Strasbourg, through many neat and well-scrubbed villages with high-gabled, white, pink and pale-blue cottages, and churches with cone-shaped spires; through the sacred forest of the Druids at Hagenau, through Brumath, the Brotomagium of the Romans, still shaped like a Roman camp – one of the fifty forts the Romans had built along the Rhine against the invasion of the barbarians. 'The Maginot Line of the Romans,' Knittel remarked. At Bechelbronn we reached the oil country, with oil wells emerging from the green fields on the left. Beyond them, at the northern end of the Vosges, was the Pfaffenschlück mountain, one of the most highly-fortified spots along the frontier. Trenches of concrete stretched right up to the crest of the mountain, which, I was told, was 'hollow with dug-outs and casemates, and internal galleries, complete with electric trains and what not'. Up till now we had not seen many fortifications, for the road we had taken was a few miles west of the Rhine. But here, with the high mountains of the Palatinate right in front of us, we were clearly in military territory. At every few hundred yards we saw concrete pill-

boxes emerging like mushrooms from beneath the ground, and since the Rhineland coup six weeks ago barbed-wire defences had been placed here in the middle of peaceful-looking fields and meadows, with hens and ducks walking among them.

These pill-boxes were apparently inhabited by soldiers, though we did not see many of them on the road. (It was no good being too inquisitive.) Near Woerth – shades of Bismarck and Moltke! – we passed a newly-built barrack with *poilus* outside, all of them looking rather bored. One of them was trying to poach trout in the stream on the other side of the road. In one or two places we crossed a narrow-gauge line, which had not been there (I was told) two months ago.

We lunched at Obersteinbach, in the shadow of the Palatinate mountains – foie gras, truite, poularde, vin d'Alsace, mirabelle and all. I don't know if Obersteinbach figures in the *carte gastronomique de la France*, but it should. We were told that on March 7, many of the customs officials had sent their families 'across the Vosges', but that they had since returned.

Knittel was in great form, telling many of the latest stories *aus dem dritten Reich*, and a *Wirtinvers* – a German limerick – beginning:

> Frau Wirtin hatt' einen S.A.
> Der stand dem Hauptmann Roehm sehr nah.

Poor Roehm and his *Lustknabe*! Knittel – a hundred per cent Alsatian, who served in the German Army during the War – doesn't seem to care much for the Dritte Reich.

. . . . . .

They don't speak German in Alsace, but a dialect as incomprehensible as Norwegian. Last night I went to a big election meeting at Strasbourg held by the Dissident Communists (though there is little Communism about them) who now style themselves the *Heimatsfront* or the *Arbeiter und Bauern Partei*. It is an extraordinarily incoherent combination of various Alsatian tendencies. A witty American who was in Strasbourg some time ago described it as a combination of Trotski, Goering and the Pope. It produces two papers – the *ELZ – the Elsass-Lothringische Zeitung* – and the Dissident

Communist *Neue Welt,* both with only very small circulations. These papers are not openly pro-German, but contain such propaganda as: 'What have they [the French] made of Alsace? An armed camp, in which the workers cry in vain for bread.' (Actually the economic depression is not much worse here than anywhere else.) These two papers are quoted extensively in the German Press as the representative expression of Alsatian opinion. Anyone who believes that since the Saar plebiscite 'all territorial questions are settled between France and Germany' (Hitler), should look at a periodical published in Freiburg-in-Breisgau called *Elsass-Lothringische Nachrichten,* full of separatist propaganda and motherly concern for the people of Alsace-Lorraine.

The two principal speakers at the *Heimatsfront* meeting were Herr Hüber, the former Mayor of Strasbourg (who spoke in dialect) and who is standing in the election, and Herr Mourer, the present Deputy for Strasbourg 2. Mourer, who has not distinguished himself in any way at the Chamber, is a young man of thirty-eight, and a former officer in the German Air Force. He spoke in German, for he comes from Metz, where people speak either French or German, but not dialect. His speech was directed mainly against M. Georges Weill, Hüber's Socialist competitor, a supporter of the League and 'indivisible peace'. Herr Mourer's principal theme, which he developed with much demagogic vigour, was the necessity of coming to terms with Germany, and of denouncing the Franco-Soviet Pact. Weill, Mourer said, was the only Socialist in the Chamber who had voted for the extension of the French military service, and the only Alsatian Deputy who had voted for the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact. This 'Jew and Socialist' (who is, at the same time, a distinguished French ex-soldier) is – as I have discovered – also denounced with great violence in the German Press, which takes a very keen interest in the election in Alsace.

Herr Mourer spoke with great admiration of Hitler, and said that he could 'fully appreciate Germany's point of view', when she denounced Locarno. Alsace, he said, would be the first to suffer from a Franco-German war, and it was absolutely essential that France and Germany made friends. All obstacles like the Franco-Soviet Pact must be cleared out of the way.

The Jewish emigrants who had been driven out of Germany, were now trying to take their revenge on Hitler by provoking France into attacking Germany; but if they succeeded, they would have a heavy price to pay. This outburst against the Jews was loudly cheered – for in Strasbourg, where most of the trade is in Jewish hands there is a strong anti-Jewish feeling, which is now being thoroughly exploited by the *Heimatsfront* – much more loudly, indeed, than Mourer's defence of Hitler and the Locarno coup, which was received with visible coolness and scepticism. Even so, this pro-Nazi propaganda – supported by Germany – seems to be making some headway in Alsace, and words like 'make friends with Germany at any price for Alsace's sake' do not seem to be without effect.[1]

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The Dissident Communists of Alsace are the most important autonomist group with pro-German and pro-Nazi leanings. Among the autonomists, they represent the 'Left', and their main object is to capture votes which would normally go to the regular Socialists and Communists. But while more virulently autonomist than the Catholic autonomism of a Stürmel or Rossé, even the autonomism of the Dissident Communists is not Separatist.

Probably not more than five per cent of Alsatians would like to 'go back to Germany'. These are mostly real Germans – many of them former officials who, being married to Alsatian women, were granted French nationality after the reunion with France. But autonomism proper is not separatist. It is clerical and educational. The Church plays an important part in Alsace and, as distinct from the rest of France, the Concordat is still in force here. There is no separation of Church and State, and the clergy – Catholic and Protestant alike – are officials paid by the State. The State schools are denominational – or 'confessional' as they are called here – and not *laïque*, as they are in France. Alsatian autonomism in its

[1] Mourer was re-elected in the 1936 election and Huber beat Weill. Under the Front Populaire Government with Blum, a Jew, at its head, this pro-Nazi propaganda tended, for a time, to increase, and 'Berlin rather than Moscow' became a fairly popular slogan in certain Alsatian quarters. The great military parade that accompanied M. Lebrun's visit to Strasbourg in September did, however, a great deal to check this propaganda. Many Alsatians who were beginning to think poorly of France were enormously impressed by the quality of the new French Army material.

most prevalent sense is therefore simply a movement in favour of the status quo, and against any change. 'Autonomism,' an Alsatian told me, 'is simply a revolver we keep in our drawer. We shall bring it out when the burglar comes' – the eventual burglar being, for instance, a French Left-Wing Government determined to *gleichschalt* Alsace, and deprive it of its present clerical and educational privileges – which represent its present existing 'autonomy'. Any such attempt to 'laicise' the Alsatian schools would meet with fierce resistance from the priests and their followers; – and there would *then* be a real autonomist movement. At present there is only a constant threat of one.

The two great clerical parties in Alsace – the Union Populaire Republicaine and the Action Populaire Nationale Alsacienne – are, as it were, the direct continuation of the old German Centre Party or, to be more exact, of the *Elsasser Zentrum Partei*; for in pre-War Alsace which was, politically, the Cinderella of the Hohenzollern Reich, the 'particularism' of the Alsatians was greater than now, and even their priests always considered themselves distinct from the priests of the Centre Party.

The Alsatian Centre Party consisted of two wings – a small pro-German wing led by Professor Martin Spahn (now a Nazi living in Germany) who was never even elected to the Reichstag, and a much larger pro-French wing led by the famous Abbé Wetterlé. Among the grievances of the pro-French Catholics were (1) the refusal to give Alsace-Lorraine – the Reichsland, under the direct control of the Kaiser – even that minimum of home rule enjoyed by Bavaria and the other German States (it was actually not until 1911 that Alsace-Lorraine was allowed to send a representative to the Landtag), and (2) the German rule of placing 'real' Germans at the head of all the Alsatian schools.

To-day a large number of the head-masters in Alsace are Alsatians, and the Home Rule question has lost its acuteness in the absence of any other self-governing parts of France. The more extreme autonomists, it is true, ask (though without much insistence) for the creation of a regional Parliament – a tendency on the lines of Scottish Nationalism. A rather more vital problem is that of the priority of French over

German, and vice versa, in the schools. The more extreme clericals claim that German is the 'mother tongue' of Alsace and should not be taught (as it is now) only four hours a week, 'as though it were a foreign language'. There is also a tendency among the priests to teach religion in German, though this is now losing ground. In many of the schools, particularly in those run by nuns, religion is taught in French. The teachers are allowed to use their own discretion in this matter. All this is very different from German rule, when French was completely barred from the schools, and 'assimilation' was the watchword of the German Government.

It may safely be said that if only a negligible part of the Alsatians would welcome a return to Germany, and perhaps fifteen or twenty per cent are autonomist in a more than sentimental way, all the rest are, at heart, perfectly content to be French citizens – provided their privileges are left intact. Only the Alsatians are, by nature, professional grumblers; and the French are not unduly disturbed by their grumbling. For under German rule they grumbled a hundred times more. And many of them still remember the reign of terror during the War, when French was not allowed to be spoken in the streets of Strasbourg and 20,000 Alsatians were deported to Germany.

Of the sixteen deputies elected in 1932 one may say that ten were fully pro-French – which does not mean that they are not Alsatians, far from it. For, as distinct from autonomism, regionalism – that is, a desire to preserve the local customs, dialect, and other characteristics – is almost general in Alsace, even among the most nationalist of French patriots. I was introduced here to 'the Robert Burns of Alsace' – M. Albert Mathis, a kindly old man with a long white goatee beard who, besides singing the natural beauties of his country, also proclaims in his dialect lyrics his love for the tricolour flag, the flag of liberty and the French Revolution.

The ten 'purely French' deputies include two Socialists. Of the six deputies who are not 'one hundred per cent' French one is a Dissident Communist; three, M. Dahlet, M. Rossé, the Mayor of Colmar, and M. Sturmel (this one officially an autonomist), have been rather troublesome from the French point of view and have been apt, under various influences, to

denounce the 'forced assimilation' practised in the schools; and the remaining two are simply Catholics with strong regionalist, but not autonomist, sentiments. These people continue, as one of their enemies put it, the old pre-War 'blackmail', from which Berlin had to suffer, and from which Paris suffers – though in a much lesser degree and with less cause. The Church is largely responsible for the particularism and potential and threatened, but in no sense actual, autonomism of Alsace. The clericals also forbid their congregations (though mostly in vain) to read the *Dernières Nouvelles de Strasbourg* (published both in French and German), the largest paper in Alsace, with a Liberal, Radical (in the French sense), and mildly anticlerical tendency – a tendency towards what may be called the juridical *Gleichschaltung* of Alsace and towards the abolition of the privileges of the Alsatian Church. 'Although Alsace loves liberty,' a prominent Alsatian told me, 'and although we have more liberty since we again became part of France than we ever had before, we are still largely ruled by a Conservative clergy, and what we have always lacked, and are still lacking, is a real Radical tradition.'[1]

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Nancy, April 23.

Lorraine – or rather this part of Lorraine, which was not annexed by Germany in 1871 – has been and still is the stronghold of French nationalism. It is the land of Joan of Arc, of Maurice Barrès, of the great *revanche* movement of pre-War days; it is the country of Poincaré and Maginot. The population of Nancy which was 40,000 in 1870, nearly doubled after Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, many of the Alsatians who would not stay under German rule settling at Nancy, the capital of the old Grand Duchy of Lorraine. It had a profound effect on Nancy. I remember the last interview Poincaré gave to a Paris newspaper shortly before his death. Throwing open the window, he pointed a trembling

[1] The Alsatians demonstrated once again their independent-mindedness in the 1936 election. They kept aloof from the general French landslide to the Left. Only one regular Communist was returned in Alsace (Daul in Strasbourg III), and Huber beat Weill in Strasbourg I – which was an autonomist victory. Apart from two other constituencies where two new men were returned (who did not, however, differ greatly from their predecessors), there was no change in the remaining twelve constituencies.

finger towards the east, murmuring: 'Some day they will come again.' The Lorrainers – much more than the Alsatians – have in their blood this feeling of an ever-present German menace – and it is probably stronger now than ever. Many of the peasants here have been blaming the government for not having 'marched into Germany' on March 7. These Lorrainers, who have never forgotten 1914 and 1870, would that day have welcomed a preventive war.

Here at Nancy one is a million miles away from the cheerful and optimistic republicanism of the country south of the Loire. The Lorrainers are cold, humourless, and a little grim. They are not open to friendships; 'but once,' they say in France, 'a Lorrainer has become your friend, he is your friend for life.' This nationalism has been fruitful soil for all kinds of anti-Republican movements, and nearly all the deputies for Lorraine are men of the Right. They include M. Louis Marin, the G.O.M. of the French Conservatives. But M. Marin, at least, is a good Republican. Rather different are such representatives of Lorraine as M. de Wendel, the steel magnate, who was until recently a deputy for Nancy, and M. Desiré Ferry, the editor of the *Liberté*, the most Chauvinist paper in France, and an avowed member of the Croix de Feu. The Royalist organisation at Nancy, with 1,000 active members, is one of the strongest outside Paris; stronger still is the local organisation of the Croix de Feu, and there are also groups of Jeunesses Patriotes, Francistes, and so on.

The Conservatism of Lorraine is not mainly clerical as in some parts of Brittany and Normandy, but Nationalist, and heavy industry – the Comité des Forges – plays an extremely important part in the political life in this part of the country, Some of the most important iron foundries are in the Nancy region; and there is consequently a fairly important proletarian population here; but the middle class and the peasantry of the region have so far been strongly Nationalist. It is rather by a fluke that Nancy has now a predominantly Radical Town Council.

The Front Populaire has been putting up a strong fight at Nancy – and it is an uphill fight. In 1932 M. Marin had a majority of 6,000 and M. Desiré Ferry one of 10,000. Yet it is chiefly M. Ferry whom the Front Populaire has been 'after'.

It is this member of the Croix de Feu who glorified in his paper the 'spirit of the Sixth of February', who conducted the most savage campaign of all against the Radical leaders, and supported all the anti-Parliamentary movements in the country. M. Ferry was extremely annoyed to find himself faced with a Front Populaire coalition in a constituency where in the past he had always been returned almost unopposed.

I began my tour at Nancy by going to a big election meeting of M. Marin. The old man, with his famous flowing spotted tie, his long white hair, and heavy, white moustache, was in good form that night. He was eloquent in his attacks on Germany and on the Radicals who had broken up the last two 'National Governments'. But the audience was not unduly enthusiastic. One part found M. Marin too 'reactionary', another part not reactionary enough – too old-fashioned a Conservative without the necessary 'dynamic vigour'.

From there I went to a much smaller meeting held in a café by a Left-Wing candidate, a young Paris barrister called M. Lapie, who turned out to be the private secretary of M. Paul-Boncour. He made the usual Left-Wing speech against deflation, against the Bank of France and the '200 families' (an ever-recurring theme in the election campaign this year, and a theme which has undoubtedly 'caught on'), and made some pointed remarks about the armaments manufacturers of Lorraine, who, he said, had worked hand in hand with Krupp during the War. As in Alsace, so also here, the Left are making capital out of the enormous increase in the last two years in the exports of iron ore from Lorraine to Germany. M. Lapie appealed to the voters to prove 'that Lorraine is not anti-Republican, that its heart is with the Republic, and that the great traditions of the French Revolution, whose destruction is openly advocated by M. Ferry in the *Liberté,* are still alive in Lorraine'. He also brought in a few appropriate remarks about the glorious tricolour flag and about Joan of Arc. To show that the Left care at least as much for national defence as the Right he recalled that the 'Maginot Line' was not built by Maginot at all, but by Painlevé, a man of the Left – and that the phrase 'Maginot Line' was invented by the Right for election purposes.

He was heckled by a pugnacious young man with dirty

hands and teeth, who declared himself to be 'high up' in the Croix de Feu movement – a type of person vastly different from the polite young gentlemen one sees at Croix de Feu meetings in Paris. 'We are Republicans,' he growled. 'Then why,' the Radical candidate retorted, 'do all your young people keep on saying that they will not tolerate a Front Populaire Government? That seems to be the general idea among all the Croix de Feu people who have done me the honour to come to my meetings.'

'If they told you that,' said the Croix de Feu man, 'they are misinformed on the real designs of Colonel de la Rocque.' He then charged the Radicals with hypocrisy when they exalted the tricolour flag, 'for you are the allies,' he said, 'of Moscow and the Communists, and your flag is the Red Flag.'

M. Lapie told me that he had had some 'pretty savage' meetings during his campaign. 'At one Left-Wing meeting at Nancy (not mine fortunately) some shots were fired – probably by a Royalist. The peasants in particular are most irresponsive.'

The next day he took me in his car to a village some five miles from Nancy. The village, with its stone cottages and dung-heaps and its hens and pigs wandering about the road, was more primitive than the Alsatian villages. At the Mairie, with its fly-stained patriotic pictures and a portrait of President Carnot, we were received by a distrustful old *garde champêtre*, who, after receiving a tip, volunteered to announce the meeting by beating his drum round the village. This he did, calling out at the same time that a candidate was waiting at the Mairie for '*Messieurs les électeurs*'. After a long wait ten or twelve yokels arrived at the Mairie, wearing caps and rough country clothes. Some of them wore wooden shoes, others carpet slippers, for it was a Saturday afternoon.

In the meantime the Socialist candidate had, by coincidence, also arrived in the same village, and the Radical and Socialist decided to hold a joint meeting. The Socialist, who emphasised the fact that he was a War invalid (the young barrister, on the other hand, could only say that he was a reserve officer), went on to talk about the armaments manufacturers, who were working hand in hand with Germany; about the Office du Blé, the Socialist remedy for the agricultural crisis; and about the

big landowners, 'who, in 1792, came from Coblence at the head of the Prussian regiments, in the hope of killing the Front Populaire of those days'. The peasants listened silently and ironically to both the Socialist's and the Radical's speeches. They treated the young Paris barrister with particular distrust. 'We don't want any young people here,' one of them said. 'But surely,' the Socialist replied, 'M. Ferry has never done anything for you but come here once in four years to ask you for your votes.' 'That's enough!' an old peasant said. 'We don't want to listen to you any more. You have done nothing but attack M. Ferry.'

We then drove off to another village. 'Such fine people,' M. Lapie complained, 'but so irresponsive.' The other meetings were little better. The peasants obviously disliked the young Paris barrister; 'he is not even a chap from Lorraine,' one of them declared. To be 'a chap from Lorraine' is an important qualification for any candidate in this part of the world.

In the evening we drove to a large meeting in an industrial suburb of Nancy. There the Front Populaire enthusiasm was in full swing, and, far from contradicting M. Lapie when he denounced the Comité des Forges and the Fascist propaganda of M. Ferry's paper, the people cheered lustily. There is just a chance he may get in.[1]

[1] Thanks to the close co-operation between the Left-Wing forces, M. Ferry, with his 10,000 majority, was beaten by M. Lapie by 300 votes. Lapie headed the poll in the first ballot, and in the second he obtained all the Socialist and Communist votes. Impressed by his success in the first ballot (M. Lapie afterwards told me), even some of the peasants – 'who like to back the winner' – voted for him. It was one of the most dazzling victories of the Front Populaire. On the other hand, M. Marin was re-elected.

CHAPTER XVI

ENTER LÉON BLUM

THE first ballot was held on April 26, and the second on May 3. In the first, only in less than half the constituencies was a candidate – who had secured an absolute majority – returned.

On both Sundays the polling was calm and orderly; but this was not a sign of indifference – the poll was eighty-five per cent – higher even than in 1932. The fact that elections in France are not accompanied by fireworks, and that the majority of Frenchmen do not make public demonstrations of their political feelings in the open street, and do not spend every evening at political meetings, is no indication of indifference. An election to a Frenchman is not so much an exciting sport as a solemn occasion. Most of them decide weeks, and perhaps even months, if not years, in advance how they are going to vote; for in France, much more even than in England:

> Every child that's born alive
> Is either a little Liberal or a little Conservative,

that is, a man of the Right or a man of the Left; and any changes in election majorities are a matter of a few hundred thousand votes shifting one way or the other. There have seldom been any 'landslides' in France; and if one keeps to this rough division between Left and Right, one will find that even in the 1936 election the 'landslide' was not as important as is suggested by the number of deputies returned for the Right and Left parties.

But the Left won, because they adhered closely and loyally to the Front Populaire Pact – the electorate even more so than the candidates themselves. When Marcel Déat, the Neo-Socialist Minister of Air in the Sarraut Government, refused to withdraw in favour of the Communist who had scored a few votes more than he, the electorate punished him for this

breach of the Front Populaire Pact, and many of his supporters in the first ballot transferred their votes to the Communist in the second ballot. But Déat was one of the few Left candidates who did not observe the rules of the game.

The first ballot had already shown the way the wind was blowing – Communists gaining heavily; Socialists holding their own (or a little more than their own if account is taken of the 1933 split, when thirty Socialists left the party) and Radicals losing ground; and it seemed for a moment that the Socialists, or at any rate, the Radicals might become scared lest the Front Populaire Pact played too much into the hands of the Communists. But the Front Populaire *mystique* was so strong in the country that, happen what may, practically all the Left candidates – except a few Radicals – played the game by withdrawing in favour of the most favoured Left candidate in the first ballot.

There were few incidents before the second ballot, and few last minute surprises. M. Martinaud Déplat, a Radical in one of the Paris constituencies, who had not 'played the game', was injured in a fight with Communists. The Press of the Right intensified its 'Red Scare' campaign, with its atrocity stories about Spain (already!); there was even one bright reporter who had managed to interview Bela Kun in Barcelona – though the same paper inadvertently published on the following day a message from its Moscow correspondent saying that Bela Kun was in Moscow; and the *Journal* published the results of its referendum, which was one of the biggest jokes of the year. 'Who,' it had asked, 'are the four French statesmen who enjoy your greatest confidence?' And a few days later it published the results of the 'first 55,000 answers': Laval, 25,900 votes; Tardieu, 23,055; Mandel, 12,870; Flandin, 6,230. The *Canard Enchainé* had the bright idea of adding the figures, and the total came to 68,055 votes, 'out of a total of 55,000'. 'The *Journal* has gone one better than Hitler,' it remarked. The *Journal* thereupon replied that the *Canard* had spoken too soon: for everybody was supposed to send in *four* names. The *Canard* replied: 'Sorry. But, if so, there should have been not 55,000 votes, but 220,000 votes; and you have published only 68,055. What have you done with the rest?' The *Journal* said no more.

Perhaps the most notable eve-of-the-poll episode was an appeal by Marshal Pétain for 'National Reconciliation'. The appeal was full of Croix de Feu terminology, and the Right hoped that this intervention in their favour by the eighty-year-old Hero of Verdun would create an impression. But it was of no importance. Neither was Colonel de la Rocque's final eve-of-the-poll statement – the most openly Fascist statement he had made for a long time:

> 'This election, which could have been disastrous, clearly shows the extent of the Red Menace and reveals the impossibility of Parliamentary Government in the present state of confusion. But the forces of national recovery have been left intact. The Croix de Feu movement has arrived in time to prevent a definite triumph of the powers of disruption. The Front Populaire is not a political structure, but a tool made by the Communist party for the benefit of Moscow, whose bloody and revolutionary designs it hopes to carry out.'

Thus spoke *le grand vaincu* of the 1936 election.

The final results after the second ballot, compared with the old Chamber (before it rose) were:

	New Chamber	Old Chamber
Right: Conservatives, U.R.D. [Marin Group] and Popular Democrats (Catholics)	122	105
Centre: (Left Republicans and Independent Radicals)[1]	116	164
Left: Radicals	116	158
Socialist Union (Paul-Boncour) and other small Left Parties..	36	66
Socialists	146	101
Dissident Communists (Pupistes)	10	11
Communists	72	10
	618	615

Though there are always some doubtful and shifty elements at the Chamber – particularly along the Centre–Left border –

[1] The division between Right and Centre is somewhat arbitrary, all the more so as the Right and Centre 'groups' at the Chamber do not always correspond to the 'party' labels in the election. Thus most of the members of the Left Republican *Group* in the Chamber belong to the Alliance Democratique *Party*. In the election the members of the A.D. usually used the Chamber label. Moreover, some members of the Popular Democrats are less 'Right' in outlook than some Left 'Republicans'.

the Left had, nominally, 379 seats, as against the 239 seats of the opposition. In the old Chamber the figures were, respectively, 342 and 269.

The number of votes cast was as follows:

	1936	1932
Right	2,254,000	2,262,000
Centre	1,938,000	2,225,000
Radicals	1,461,000	1,805,000
Small Left Groups	518,000	511,000
Socialists	1,922,000	1,931,000[1]
Dissident Communists	95,000	85,000
Communists	1,503,000	794,000

In the Département of the Seine (Paris and its immediate neighbourhood) the Communists, with 360,000 votes, were the strongest single party. Next came the Right with 210,000, the Centre with 171,000, the Socialists with 139,000, and the Radicals, etc., with 124,000, the remaining 52,000 going to the dissident Communists (including Doriot at St. Denis – who is classed among them somewhat arbitrarily in the official election returns).

Geographically, the Right were strongest in rural Brittany and Normandy (strongly under clerical influence), but not in the bigger ports; in the Vendée; in a few remote rural districts of Southern France (such as the Aveyron and the Ardèche) and in Lorraine (in spite of some startling setbacks such as M. Ferry's defeat at Nancy). The Socialists and Radicals led with about equal strength in almost the whole of rural France south of the Loire. In the Rhône (Lyons) the Right led with 60,000, with the Socialists, Radicals and Communists following with about 40,000 each. In the Bouches du Rhône (Marseilles) the Socialists (62,000) were strongest, with the Communists (55,000) a good second, and the Right and Centre with 50,000 between them. In the industrial Nord and Pas-de-Calais the votes were sixty per cent Socialist and Communist and forty per cent Right and Centre. In a number of purely rural districts (such as the Corrèze) the Communists secured over twenty per cent of the votes. The two most 'reactionary' departments in France were the Orne in Normandy (52,000 Right and Centre, 4,000 Radicals and

[1] This included votes cast for candidates who later became Dissident Socialists.

Socialists and 4,000 Communists), and the Vendée (65,000 Right, 14,000 Centre, 7,000 Radicals, 1,200 Socialists and 2,700 Communists).

The victory of the Front Populaire was complete; and it was a clear verdict against Fascism, against deflation, against the '200 families', against the *marchands de canons*, and against 'National Government'. The support (albeit grudging support) they had given to deflation and to the National Governments of MM. Doumergue and Laval, had cost the Radicals over forty seats. France was going to turn over a new leaf.

M. Léon Blum, the leader of now the largest party in the Chamber, was the most obvious candidate for the Premiership. Two days after the election, it was officially announced that Blum was prepared to form the new government. For three weeks M. Blum was in a peculiar position. The powers of the old Chamber did not expire until May 31; and, according to the Constitution (or so at least it had been traditionally interpreted) the old government had to remain in power until the new Chamber met. In May 1936, this proved a particularly unfortunate arrangement. The Sarraut Government (three of whose members had lost their seats) had no longer any authority, and public opinion was anxiously waiting to see what the new government would do. It has been, though not necessarily rightly, observed that the impatience caused by three weeks' waiting had at least something to do with the great stay-in strike movement, which broke out towards the end of the May interregnum; and that effective action by the new government immediately after the election victory might have discouraged such a movement.

Moreover, a serious financial crisis had started after the first ballot on April 26; and during the first week in May, the flight from the franc and the export of gold again took on alarming proportions. Instead of M. Sarraut, the French Premier, plain M. Blum, without any official government position, was expected to do something about it. Almost equally serious was the international situation. Addis-Ababa had been captured by the Italians, and the question arose of raising or continuing sanctions. M. Flandin was not in a position to take any decision – and neither was M. Blum. He wrote articles in the *Populaire* in which he proclaimed his intention

of 'restoring the authority of the League' and – this was very cautiously worded – of 'saving what still remained to be saved of international law in the Abyssinian affair'. But, after all, an article in the *Populaire* was not a diplomatic note and committed nobody to anything. And so the anomalous situation continued for over three weeks.

Léon Blum is so complex a character that he cannot be fairly described in a few words. It is agreed that his mind is a sophisticated one, and the words *'esprit subtil'* have often been applied to him, both in a laudatory and in a derogatory sense. He has also been called a doctrinaire – though never a demagogue; but even the word doctrinaire suggests a mind more rigid than Blum's. He has also been described as a refined intellectual – and, indeed, when you see Blum, you sometimes imagine that Marcel Proust's Swann would have looked rather like him in his old age. At the same time, this *esthète* and *salonnard* is also the successor of Jaurès, and a great leader of the French working class. It is all strange to the point of being incongruous.

Léon Blum was born in 1872, one of the five sons of a wealthy Jewish ribbon manufacturer who had moved to Paris from Alsace. His parents' house was in the rue Saint Denis, in the 'soft-goods' district of Paris, but one which, in Blum's own words, 'was also a popular quarter still haunted by the memories of Republican insurrections'. 'Before going to the Lycée Charlemagne,' he wrote on another occasion, 'I frequented the elementary schools around the rue Granéta where I got to know the children of small Republican artisans.' He used to pester his father with questions as to why he sold his goods dearer than he had bought them. The most important influence of his early years was his maternal grandmother, known in the family as *la Communarde* because of her fiery sympathy for the Commune of 1871. She was a woman of strong character, who converted young Léon to Socialism at the age of six, and trained him in the cult of revolutionary heroes.

After the Lycée Charlemagne he went to the École Normale Supérieure. It was there that he came under the influence of Lucien Herr, the librarian of the school. Herr survives in no book or writings of his own, but in strong personal influence

upon generation after generation of students, many of whom he converted to his own Socialist faith. It was also Herr who, in 1896, introduced Blum to Jaurès, eighteen years his senior. Of Blum in his early twenties we have an interesting record in the diaries of Jules Renard, the author of the famous *Poil de Carotte*. In 1895 he wrote: 'Léon Blum, a smooth-cheeked young man with the voice of a girl, who for two hours by the clock can recite Pascal, La Bruyère and St. Evremond.' And three years later, at the time of Fashoda, Renard wrote: 'Léon Blum explained precisely and eloquently the absurdity of an Anglo-French war. Charming, this beardless young man, who might be a trifler, but instead, comments luminously on difficult subjects.' And a few years later: 'Léon Blum is very intelligent, but not a bit witty. That's nice for people like me who think they are witty, but are not sure if they are intelligent.'[1] In the 'nineties young Blum had all the qualities that would make for success in the more intellectual circles of Paris society. He had grace and social charm, was well-to-do, and had the quick eye and wrist of the practised fencer, and had fought several duels. He belonged to one of the most distinguished branches of the Civil Service – the Conseil d'Etat.

His social progress continued. Fifteen years later he had become a well-known social figure, the author of a good book on Stendhal, a successful civil servant, and one of the three or four most famous theatre critics in Paris. But, as Gillie says, 'for a man of his position he was singularly persistent in very radical opinions. His book on marriage scandalised orthodox moralists.'

He was a Socialist. He had joined the United Socialist Party on the date of its formation in 1903, and had, indeed, been a member of a Socialist group since the age of seventeen.

Like Jaurès, Blum was, naturally, a passionate Dreyfusard; and the whole Dreyfus case had a deep influence on his character and his political outlook.

Even so, during the subsequent years, he remained intellectual first and Socialist second. On July 31, 1914, Jaurès was assassinated, and the Socialist Party was left without a head.

[1] Quoted in an admirable sketch of Blum in the *Morning Post* of May 22 1936, by its Paris correspondent, Darsie R. Gillie.

Perhaps Blum was aware of this when, soon after Jaurès's death, he became, for the first time in his life, actively connected with politics. At the age of forty-two he became *chef de Cabinet* to Marcel Sembat, Minister of Public Works, who was one of the two Socialists who entered the government during the War. During those years he made a careful study of the Parliamentary system, and assembled his views in a series of articles published anonymously in 1918 (they have since been reprinted in book form).

In 1919 he stood for Parliament for the first time. It was the *bleu horizon* Chamber with its vast Nationalist majority. The Radical Party, torn by internal dissentions, had practically been wrecked by Clemenceau, and the Socialist Party, with its sixty-nine members (of whom fourteen split off at the Tours Congress of 1920 and became Communists) were the only Left Party to be reckoned with. M. Millerand and M. Poincaré discovered this before long. During the War the Socialists had also been divided, and, after the overwhelming victory of the Right, were suffering from a certain inferiority complex. It was Léon Blum who, a few months after his election, succeeded in convincing the Majority that the small Socialist group was capable of not only systematic, but also articulate opposition. This sore necessity of creating and maintaining an opposition in the smug Chamber of 1919 – an opposition which would miss no opportunity in criticising the government – had a far-reaching effect on Blum's Parliamentary career. To be leader of the Opposition became almost second nature with him; – and, in later years, when his target was no longer an all-powerful Poincaré, but some poor Radical Premier, sorely in need of indulgence, he sometimes overdid his 'oppositionism'.

It has often been said that if only Blum had had the physique and the voice of Jaurès, he would have been the greatest political leader in France. But he is not a great orator. His voice – to use Renard's phrase – is a girl's voice – and is sometimes scarcely audible in the Press gallery of the Chamber. The gestures he makes with his long arms are not always devoid of a touch of comedy; to stress a point, his long forefingers suddenly start revolving in front of his face, 'like a mouse cleaning its whiskers', as David Scott once remarked.

But one really has to read his speeches, to realise fully the alertness and clarity of his mind.

Needless to say, Blum has been a first-rate influence in the political history of France since the War. His speeches against the Ruhr occupation, when he warned Poincaré against quarrelling with England and isolating France are still well remembered. So also is his campaign for disarmament during the years that followed – and particularly his brilliant criticisms of Tardieu and Laval in 1930–1. He was the most eloquent exponent of the Disarmament doctrine, and his closely reasoned book *Les Problèmes de la Paix*[1] is a classic on the subject.

No doubt, many Frenchmen found it 'unrealistic' and 'doctrinaire', and his forecast about the decline of the Hitler movement has since prompted many Frenchmen to say: 'Thank God we didn't listen to him.' But as leader of the Opposition he was bound to treat such problems in a seemingly uncompromising spirit – just as, several years later (as we have seen above) he was bound to condemn fully and unreservedly the introduction of the Two-Year Service.

Blum was the guardian of the virgin purity of the Socialist Party since the War; – and this conviction that, to keep strong, the Socialist Party must not fraternise and compromise with any bourgeois party – not even with the Radicals – largely accounts for his Parliamentary conduct in the last fifteen years. He was prepared to support the Radicals 'so long as they behaved'; but seldom hesitated to overthrow them if they did anything that was in serious contradiction with Socialist principles.

He was a Marxist, and believed in the international solidarity of the working class; he believed that the Socialists could be strong only by 'being themselves'. He deplored the attacks made on the Socialists by the Communists, and felt that, of all the Socialists, the French Socialists deserved least of all to be treated as flunkeys of the bourgeoisie; and he continued to hope that the two working-class parties would some day be reunited. As we have seen, he treated, in 1934, with some distrust the Communist proposals for a United Front; –

[1]In English *Peace and Disarmament*, translated by Alexander Werth. (Jonathan Cape, London, 1932.)

proposals which were made after the Communists themselves had rejected the 'genuine' advances of the Socialists; for he attributed these new proposals to a *volte-face* that had been dictated to the Communists by Moscow, which was serving its own international ends.

His relations with the French working class were rather peculiar. He represented in their eyes, as it were, the Centre of the Party; the Left militants, under Zyromski and Marceau Pivert, did not think him sufficiently revolutionary and they were only too well aware of his distrust of the Communists; as for the Right Wing, they considered him too uncompromising as a Parliamentary leader, and too internationalist in temperament (hence the 1933 split when Marquet, Déat, and other Neos, with their nationalist ideas – 'Fascist', Blum called them, – as well as Renaudel, Blum's old rival, left the party).

The Socialist rank and file had a great personal regard for Blum; but it would be untrue to say that he was popular. He was not a *grand tribun* like Jaurès; they felt that his speeches were on a higher intellectual plane than all the other Socialist speeches; and his aristocratic manner made them a little uneasy. He was not 'one of ours'; and they usually called him 'Monsieur Blum'; for 'camarade' didn't quite suit him, somehow. Blum is always a little distant except with people he knows very well; and he can – quite involuntarily – make many a newcomer feel shy and uneasy.

He is a great journalist, with a remarkable faculty of stating a difficult problem in the most clear and concise terms. His devastating criticism of Doumergue's constitutional reforms, which is quoted in an earlier chapter, is a good example of his polemical vigour.

There was, for a long time, a legend in France that Blum was enormously rich; and even the Socialist rank and file believed it; – though they never held it against him. Actually, he was well off until a few years ago; but since 1934 he has been almost on the verge of financial difficulties. Since the Sixth of February many French dressmaking and milliners' firms have been boycotting Blum ribbons, from which he received the bulk of his income.

For Blum was detested by the Right as few men are. He has been the most vigorous critic of nationalism, the banks,

the Press, the Fascist Leagues, and of Doumergue and Laval. He favoured the proclamation of martial law after the Sixth of February, and denounced Mussolini more violently during the Abyssinian conflict than almost anybody. For years Right-Wing cartoonists like Sennep tried to ridicule him by giving him a face like Webster's Tishy; but while it was funny, it cut no ice. In 1934 and 1935 the *Action Française* and the *Solidarité Française* and certain other pro-Fascist papers did not hesitate to advocate, more or less openly, the murder of Blum. 'Blum! doesn't it sound like a revolver shot?' one of them remarked. At the time of the Abyssinian conflict, the *Action Française* warned Blum and 140 other public men of the Left that they would be massacred the day France was dragged into war with Italy. This incitement to murder was not in vain. On February 13, 1936, a crowd of Royalists had gathered near the house of Jacques Bainville, off the Boulevard St. Germain, waiting for his funeral procession to begin. By an unfortunate coincidence Blum, M. Monnet, the future Minister of Agriculture, and Mme Monnet happened at that moment to drive from the Chamber down the Boulevard St. Germain. The Royalists rushed at the car and stopped it; and, dragging Blum out of it, proceeded to beat him savagely, striking him on the head and neck with a number-plate. He would probably have been battered to death, but for the timely intervention of a few brave policemen assisted by a number of house-painters, working close by, who had witnessed the scene. Streaming with blood Blum was taken to hospital and took several weeks to recover. The incendiary pamphleteering of Charles Maurras, whose campaign against Jaurès in 1914 was rightly considered to be at least morally responsible for the Socialist leader's assassination, had again 'worked'.

That afternoon M. Sarraut made the most vigorous speech in his life, and a few hours later the Royalist leagues were dissolved. Three men were later arrested and identified as Blum's aggressors.[1] Three days later a vast protest demonstration of the Front Populaire marched from the Panthéon to the Place de la Nation. That day the French working class

[1] Subsequently, Charles Maurras was sentenced to eight months' imprisonment for incitement to murder.

felt a greater personal devotion to Blum than ever before. He had become 'one of ours'.

In a way, the Royalist attack was a lesson to Blum. He is a man of great personal courage. Without any precaution, he used to go about Paris in his little ramshackle car, driven by Madame Blum. On the Sixth of February, when the Chamber was in danger of being invaded by the rioters (and Blum would have been the first, after Daladier and Frot, to be lynched) he was one of the few deputies who remained perfectly calm and who stayed on till the very end.

Such is the complex personality of this tall, grey-haired shortsighted man, with a drooping moustache who, in May 1936, was on the point of becoming Premier of France. For fifteen years he had been Leader of the Opposition and had rejected every offer made to him to enter a government. How would this merciless critic of all governments behave once in office himself? He was watched with great curiosity, and except for the indefatigable Charles Maurras, who shrieked hysterically '*à bas les juifs! à bas les juifs!*', most of the Press reserved judgment. Among other things, it was no good quarrelling in advance with a man who would shortly be in control of the secret funds.

As already said, there was something of a financial panic during the first week in May, in the course of which the Bank of France lost two and a half milliard francs of gold. The bank-rate, already high at five per cent (since March 28) was put up to six per cent; but it did little good. Again there was talk of devaluation; for it was known that the new government was going to abandon the policy of deflation; – and what was the alternative except devaluation? – or inflation, which was no better. On May 10, before the National Council of the Socialist Party, who cheered Blum with a depth of feeling that had never been observed before, the Premier-Elect sought to reassure the Bourse. The franc – even though he did not consider it the most important question of all – would not, he said, be devalued; there was no mystery about the future government's programme – which was simply the programme of the Front Populaire – (and this did not provide for the capital levy demanded by the Communists); and while M. Blum was aware of the courage with which the policy of

deflation had been pursued – this was a little bouquet for M. Régnier, who was still Finance Minister – there was no doubt that this policy had proved a failure. By means of public works, and in other ways, the new government would seek to increase the purchasing-power of the nation, and so revive its economic activity. An easier credit policy was indispensable. The country was tired of penance [Caillaux's favourite word] and privation, which could never restore economic health.

But Blum was cautious for all that: the Front Populaire, he said, must aim at giving the nation as soon as possible a feeling that something substantial and significant was being achieved. This did not mean, however, that the great aims of their policy would be achieved in a few weeks or months. For one had to remember that the experiment would be carried out strictly within the framework of the capitalist system.

The Bourse was reassured; the withdrawals of gold stopped, and the Banks (at M. Blum's personal request, it was said) placed severe restrictions on forward foreign exchange transactions. The more 'dynamic' forces of the Left, on the other hand, were a little disappointed; and it was perhaps since that day that the conviction began to grow among the working class that the Front Populaire Government might require a little 'pushing' from outside. This feeling was clearly reflected in the stay-in strikes, which broke out a fortnight later, and, thanks to which a number of important labour reforms were to be pushed through Parliament with unexpected speed.

On the day after his speech, Blum formally asked the Communists and the C.G.T. to enter his government. The Communists refused, and in the *Humanité* of May 12, M. Vaillant Couturier proclaimed that the Communists, though not in the government, would not disillusion their electors by inactivity. Though supporting the Front Populaire Government, they would exercise outside it a sort of 'ministry of the masses', with the most ardent and disciplined elements of the Front Populaire organised in it.

This rather suggested that while the Socialists were going to bear the brunt of the battle in office, the Communists would try to play the leading part in the constituencies, and to

secure a sort of 'moral leadership' over the Left-Wing forces of the country. Nevertheless, Thorez assured Blum that the Communists would support the government 'loyally and without eclipse'.

As for the C.G.T., it also decided not to be represented in the government. M. Jouhaux, the Secretary-General of the C.G.T., who had been very 'reformist' for many years, but who had regained something of the revolutionary syndicalism of his younger days, since the recent amalgamation of the C.G.T. and the C.G.T.U. (the Communist trade unions) put forward, about the middle of May, a scheme for three-month Labour Bonds with which to finance a vast plan of public works. The proposal was badly received by M. Blum, who thought it as unsound as anything conceived by the financiers of Nazi Germany – whose example had, indeed, suggested the plan to M. Jouhaux. Moreover, M. Racamond and other Communist members of the C.G.T. (though denying all direct connection with the Communist Party) were openly hostile to joining the government. In the end, the C.G.T. decided that it could 'co-operate with the government through the medium of technical advisory committees'. Blum regretted the refusal of the C.G.T. to enter his Cabinet; as for the Communist refusal, he was secretly relieved – though he never openly admitted it; he knew them to be troublesome customers; and he also knew that even a partly Communist Government would make a bad impression abroad – especially in England; and the first principle of Blum's foreign policy was to keep on good terms with England.

As for the Radicals and other Left-Wing groups, they naturally agreed, without any difficulty, to join the government.

Blum's first speech on foreign policy during that intermediary period was made at a luncheon at the American Club on May 15. He made no reference to Abyssinia. The most important passage in his speech concerned France's future relations with the Fascist countries (which, for years, Blum had unceasingly cursed in his articles and speeches):

> 'With all nations of the world,' he said, 'whatever may be their internal policy, we wish to co-operate in eliminating the causes of conflict which might, some day, lead to war. We

wish to work with all nations and for all nations, provided they sincerely desire to work with us in building up peace. Let it not be supposed for a moment that we Socialists may ever dream of adopting an aggressive attitude, or of avenging our persecuted comrades, or of destroying this or that régime. We do not believe, as our ancestors of 1792 and 1848 did, that war can have a liberating and revolutionary virtue. We reject war absolutely.'

After paying a tribute to the United States whose struggle for independence had been 'one of the determining causes of the French Revolution', and to the generous spirit of the French Revolution, 'to which – you will forgive me a personal reflection – the race to which I belong owes its freedom and its equality,' M. Blum referred to the sore subject of war debts:

'In France the prevalent tendency is to believe that the question of war debts has been finally settled and that it no longer exists. But Americans still hold that the question is one that has not been settled, and I know it has left some deep and painful traces behind. There is a misunderstanding between the two countries, and frankness and candour alone can put an end to this misunderstanding.

'People in America do not seem to have realised to what extent the French mind had created a logical and indissoluble link between the Dawes Plan and the Hoover Moratorium and Germany's payments.

'With all my heart I wish that this misunderstanding may be cleared away. Perhaps we shall be able to do so if we succeed by our joint efforts in creating a new state of affairs in Europe and in the world; in liberating them of the bonds which enclose them like the wrappings of a dried-up mummy; if we succeed in restoring international trade and in putting an end to autarchism and economic and monetary antagonism. It is essential that Europe should organise itself and should rid itself of the obsession of a possible war.'

A number of American papers chose to conclude from this that Blum was proposing to negotiate a new war-debts settlement. The conclusion was premature, but not unjustified.

The legal term of the 1932 Chamber was moving slowly to its close. The Blum Government had practically been formed; but it still had to wait before it could take office. On Sunday, May 24, there was the traditional annual pilgrimage of Socialists and Communists to the Mur des Fédéres in

the Père Lachaise cemetery, where the Communards were shot by the troops of the Versailles Government. In 1934 the two parties had still gone to the Mur des Fédéres in two separate processions; this time the pilgrimage, with its half a million people, carrying red and tricolour flags and banners, was the great apotheosis of working-class unity. Léon Blum, the Premier-Elect, young Maurice Thorez and old Marcel Cachin, the two Communist leaders, appeared at the Mur side by side. The crowds were in a state of frantic enthusiasm. Thorez, a burly fellow with healthy red cheeks, curly fair hair, a beautiful voice, and a cruel little mouth, was like the ideal proletarian of old Marxist posters strangling the snake of capitalism with a muscular arm.

Thorez was at the height of his popularity during those days. Even the bourgeoisie had a sneaking affection for him. One night he took part in a public 'dispute' with a reactionary journalist at the Ambassadeurs, whose series of lectures and 'disputes' are frequented by all the best people in Paris. Quietly and tactfully, he wiped the floor with his opponent; and the young ladies of the upper bourgeoisie thought him quite delightful – they were thrilled to see a 'real Bolshevik', and never thought he would be so nice and well-behaved, and such a pretty boy.

But their enthusiasm did not last long. For on May 26, the first stay-in strike broke out at the Usines Nieuport at Issy-les-Moulineaux, where these aeroplane works were 'occupied' by 800 workers. It was the beginning of the most formidable strike movement that France had ever known.

Four days later, when the strikes seemed to be 'definitely' subsiding – in reality they had subsided only temporarily on account of the Whitsun week-end – Léon Blum made his most important pre-Premier speech at the Socialist Congress which had met at the Salle Huyghens – the same hall where, exactly four years earlier, the Cahiers Huyghens were drawn up. The Cahiers were then rejected by the Radicals, and the proposed Coalition Government came to nothing. But now the Radicals had already agreed, on the basis of the Front Populaire programme, to enter the government, and the problem of the new Cabinet had thus been settled in advance. The hall was decorated with red flags and draperies; the rostrum

bore the words: 'Socialism means Peace,' and the platform was decorated with evergreens, and plaster busts of Guesde and Jaurès. From time to time the band played the *Internationale* and the *Toulousaine*. The galleries were packed with the *militants* of the Seine Federation – many of them Left-Wing extremists – who loudly cheered Zyromsky's defence of stay-in strikes, and Marceau Pivert's demand that the new government reduce the term of military service. But the great event of the day was Blum's speech.

Several times in the course of it the whole congress rose like one man and cheered frantically, and when the speech was over, dozens of militants rushed to the tribune to shake his hand and to embrace him. Many of the older men had tears in their eyes. This speech defined exactly the view Blum took of the functions of the Front Populaire Government, and has often been quoted on later occasions. This is what he said:

> 'The Front Populaire movement has brought us into power, and we solemnly undertake to carry out its programme. The Front Populaire Government is a new thing. It represents not merely a combination of parties but a powerful mass movement. It will be new by its methods and by the character of its action. We have all fought the same election battle; we have all condemned the present social system, which has shown itself incapable of adjusting the relationship between production and consumption. It is a chaotic society, full of contradictions, and we must substitute for it something different.
>
> 'Our mission as a party is to build up this new society, but I shall tell you frankly that the task of the Front Populaire Government is different. Neither the Socialists alone nor the Socialists together with the other proletarian parties have a majority. Our duty is simply to carry out the Front Populaire programme.
>
> 'We are going to act within the framework of the present régime, whose very vices we have denounced.
>
> 'The ruin of bourgeois society is already an accomplished fact, if by ruin we mean that this régime is in irretrievable contradiction with itself. It is in conflict with reason, intelligence and morality. The question is whether there is a possibility of at least securing within the present régime relief for those who suffer, and of creating a peaceful transition from this Society to the Society which remains our aim? Are a small ration of justice and well-being and a large ration of hope possible in the present society?

'Not for a moment do I abandon the hope that this may be possible. But if we were to fail through insurmountable resistance then I should be the first to say to you: "It was a dream; we cannot do anything with this régime"; and then you can draw your own conclusions.'

Blum then referred to the burning problem of the stay-in strikes.

'To the financial panic,' he said, '(which, it is true, we have succeeded in checking to some extent) a social panic has been added during these last few days on the strength of the strike movement. "It is strange," our enemies say, "that the workers should ask for a forty-hour working week and for paid holidays at a time when the new government is going to ask Parliament for it. Do the workers distrust you?"

'Actually,' M. Blum said, 'there has been no violent confiscation of factories, but only their occupation – a thing that has been seen before in France. The truth is that it will always be difficult for the working class to dissociate completely direct action from political action, and it is natural that the political victory should have created some impatience among the workers.

'The whole movement, however, has remained under the control of the trade unions. We need the constant confidence of the working class; and I think we can say that we have this confidence. (Cheers.) We shall try to solve what difficulties there are by rapid action. The working class must know that we are becoming worthier every day of the confidence that it placed in us.'

Alluding to the failure of the Communists to enter the government and, on the other hand, to the Fascist menace, M. Blum said:

'I am being spoken of as a Kerensky who is preparing the way for a Lenin. I can assure you that this is not going to be a Kerensky Government; and it is equally certain that if we fail we shall be succeeded not by a Lenin.'

This meant that the Communists should know that if they failed to support the government they would play into the hands of Fascism.

Speaking of the relations between the Socialist members of the government and the party itself, M. Blum said:

'The life of the party must not be absorbed by the government's activities. The party has its own life and its own function, and it must not be weakened. The government will never, and can never, weaken the Socialist doctrine. But the

solidarity between the Socialist Ministers and the party must be complete. We have the same tasks and the same will, and we shall all remain Socialists.

'I feel happy at the thought that the victory of our party means the victory of liberty and democracy. The formation of the Front Populaire was welcomed by everybody at the recent meeting of the Socialist International in Brussels as a pledge for democracy. The voice of France may speak with greater authority now that men who have devoted their lives to democracy and have risked their lives for it are in power.'

This allusion to the Royalist outrage of February 13 was deeply appreciated.

'And we internationalists are perhaps best qualified for advocating a peace which will be complete, effective, indivisible and disarmed.

'We are determined to carry out the Front Populaire programme and we are confident that the victory of the Front Populaire will have been the first victory of Socialism.'

On the following day the new Chamber met for the first time. It was only a formal meeting, though the appearance of the seventy-two Communists, who entered the debating hall one by one with the calm and unperturbed air of *habitués*, aroused much interest. Outside, suffragettes were distributing to the deputies, as they arrived at the Chamber, little bunches of somewhat faded forget-me-nots, with a label attached: 'Good luck to the new Chamber; but don't forget us.'

Three days later, on Thursday, June 4, the Sarraut Government resigned, and a few hours afterwards the formation of the new Cabinet was announced. This was one of the largest Cabinets in the records of the Third Republic, and M. Blum had built it up on a somewhat new basis, by grouping the members of his Cabinet into seven main departments, with numerous under-secretaries, in accordance with the principles he had laid down in his book on government reform:

1. THE PREMIERSHIP AND THE MINISTERS OF STATE, comprising M. BLUM, the Premier, three Ministers of State representing the three principal parties in the Cabinet – M. CHAUTEMPS (Radical) M. PAUL FAURE (the Secretary-General of the Socialist Party – not a member of Parliament), M. VIOLETTE (Socialist Union), and two Under-Secretaries for the Premier's Office: M. DORMOY (Socialist) and M. DE TESSAN (Radical).
2. NATIONAL DEFENCE, with M. DALADIER, the Minister of

War, as head of this 'section' of the Cabinet, M. GASNIER-DUPARC, Minister of Marine, M. PIERRE COT, Minister of Air (all three Radicals) and M. BLANCHO (Socialist) Under-Secretary of Marine.

3. GENERAL ADMINISTRATION: Minister of the Interior: M. SALENGRO (Socialist) with an Under-Secretary, M. AUBAUD (Radical); Minister of Justice M. RUCART (Radical); and Minister of Education, M. JEAN ZAY (Radical), and – a spectacular innovation – two of the three women Under-Secretaries: Under-Secretary of State, MME BRUNSCHWICG (an old feminist); Under-Secretary for Scientific Research, MME JOLIOT-CURIE (daughter of the late Mme Curie).
4. FOREIGN RELATIONS AND OVERSEAS FRANCE: Foreign Minister, M. YVON DELBOS (Radical); Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, M. PIERRE VIENOT (Socialist Union); Minister of Colonies, M. MARIUS MOUTET (Socialist).
5. FINANCE AND STATE DEBT: Minister of Finance, M. VINCENT AURIOL (Socialist); Minister of Pensions, M. ANDRE RIVIERE (Socialist).
6. NATIONAL ECONOMY: Minister of National Economy, M. SPINASSE (Socialist); Under-Secretary for Mines, electricity and liquid fuel, M. RAMADIER (Socialist Union); Minister of Public Works, M. BEDOUCE (Socialist); Under-Secretary for Merchant Marine, M. TASSO (Socialist); Minister of Commerce, M. BASTID (Radical); Minister of Agriculture, M. GEORGES MONNET (Socialist); Under-Secretary for Agriculture, M. LYAUTEY (Radical); Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, M. JARDILLIER (Socialist).
7. SOCIAL SOLIDARITY: Minister of Labour, M. LEBAS (Socialist); Minister of Public Health, M. SELLIER; Under-Secretary for Physical Education, M. DEZARNAULDS (Radical); Under-Secretary for the Organisation of Sport and Leisure, M. LAGRANGE (Socialist); Under-Secretary for Child Welfare, MME LACORE.

It was a presentable team; with a great deal of new blood – which was a pleasant change from the everlasting Bonnets and Queuilles and William Bertrands. It included many young men – M. Monnet, the Minister of Agriculture was only thirty-five; M. Zay, the Minister of Education thirty-three; and many of the Under-Secretaries were in their early thirties. There were also many new government departments, especially in the economic and 'Social Solidarity' groups of the Cabinet.

The Minister of Finance, M. Vincent Auriol, an old stager and for years the official Opposition speaker on Finance, seemed rather a dry stick and M. Delbos, the Foreign Minis-

ter, seemed unnecessarily colourless – and it was assumed at first that he would simply be there to carry out Blum's orders. It was an erroneous impression.

However, the general public did not have time to scrutinise the new Cabinet too closely; for on the day it was formed, the people of Paris were concerned with something even more serious: the strike movement which, by that time, had taken on colossal proportions.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GREAT STRIKES OF JUNE 1936

Three things run through the life of the Paris *ouvrier* – work, enjoyment and – from time to time – revolution. He manages all three with speed, enthusiasm, and a very considerable degree of competence. That is why a stranger constantly feels (even the late Mr. Pogodin noticed it) as though something in Paris were always on the point of breaking out.

SALTYKOV, *Beyond the Border.*

THERE were two big strike waves: first a very short one, before the Whitsun week-end of May 30–1; and then, a much vaster one, which reached its climax on June 7, but took weeks and months to subside. The great strike started, as already said, on May 26, at the Nieuport Works at Issy-les-Moulineaux, near Paris. The following is the account of the strike published in the *Temps*:

> The agitation which could be observed among certain groups of workers at the Nieuport Works, assumed a more serious character at nine o'clock yesterday morning. Last Thursday already a group of delegates chosen by the workers had been instructed by these to lay the following demands before the employers:
>
> 1. Abolition of overtime (over and above eight hours) and the recognition of the forty-hour week;
> 2. Recognition of workers' delegates appointed exclusively by the workers themselves;
> 3. A guaranteed daily minimum wage.
>
> After a first failure to come to an agreement with the directors, the delegates again asked yesterday morning to be received by them. Unable to agree to the demand concerning the appointment of workers' delegates, the directors refused to receive them. The 850 workers thereupon decided upon a folded-arms strike, and at the same time announced that they would not leave the premises without having received satisfaction.
>
> The factory is thus on strike. At noon the strikers were supplied with food by their 'sympathisers' in the neighbourhood and by the municipality. At 4 p.m. the directors agreed,

in a conciliatory spirit, to receive the delegates, but, after a brief examination of their demands, they refused, at least for the present, to give a favourable reply.... So the workers remained in the factory, and have spent the night there.

That same afternoon a similar strike broke out at the Lavalette factory of automobile accessories at St. Ouen. At the Hotchkiss motor and armament works at Levallois, which were also threatened with a stay-in strike that day, a settlement was reached within a few hours; but strikes broke out in a few smaller works near Paris. The *Temps* did not fail to realise the importance of the 'new technique':

'A movement, the concerted character of which appears to be undeniable, broke out yesterday in several metal works of the Paris *banlieue*. While it is unnecessary to over-dramatise this movement, it is nevertheless worth noting that in two of the works where no agreement could be reached, the workers not only decided on a folded-arms strike, but occupied the premises.... This marks in France the beginning of a new strike technique.'

During the next three days, the movement rapidly spread, especially in the engineering industry of the Paris region, which came almost completely to a standstill; and also spread to the building trade, including the men employed in demolishing the Trocadero for the 1937 Exhibition. Nearly everywhere the works were occupied by the strikers.

Although the Communists afterwards claimed the credit for this strike movement, the truth is that it was, in the main, largely spontaneous. It was started by the rank and file; and if many men in this rank and file were, nominally, Communists, they acted in most, if not all, cases, without any previous consultation with the Communist leaders. It seems that the leaders – whether Socialist, Communist, or C.G.T. – were taken by surprise.

Trotsky, in his remarkable little book, *Whither France*, pays a tribute to 'the unequalled political instinct the Paris working class displayed in starting the ball rolling during that last week in May'. 'During those days,' he writes with his usual sarcasm, 'when Blum was looking at himself in the mirror from every angle, making pre-governmental gestures and uttering pre-governmental sentences, and commenting upon them in articles which were always concerned with

Blum, but never with the Proletariat – during those very days a magnificent, truly springlike wave of strikes rolled over France. Without finding anyone to direct them, the workers of Paris marched onward without such guidance, and carried out the occupation of the factories boldly and with a remarkable sureness of touch.' Trotsky would, naturally, have been reluctant to give the French Communist leaders, 'the flunkeys of Stalin', as he calls them, any credit for the strikes, even if such credit were due, but I think the following naïve and simple account by a young workman of the first stay-in strike at Renault's will show to what an extent the movement was spontaneous and joyful – a joyfulness which could not have been created by any instruction 'from above'.

Jacques's First Story

Jacques[1] is a young mechanic on the Renault works. He is not a Communist, but mildly Socialist, and does not belong to any trade union. (Indeed, almost all the labour in the French engineering industry is non-union.) He has been only a few months at Renault's. Like all the 32,000 other workers and employees of Renault, he took part in the 'stay-in' strike. He is employed in the artillery section; for it would be wrong to imagine that 'Renault' means motor-cars. At the Billancourt works cars are now only a secondary product; but full time – and indeed, more than full time – is done in the sections producing war material – tanks, aeroplane engines, armoured-cars, and so on. Here is the simple account he gave me of how it all happened.

'I arrived at the works at 7.30, on Thursday morning, as usual,' Jacques began, 'and knew nothing about the coming strike. At 7.50 I still knew nothing. But at eight o'clock one of the chaps in my team said: "At nine o'clock we stop." The chap is a Communist and must have been told in advance. At five minutes past nine the strike started in the riveting-room, in the left wing of workshop No. 32. Half an hour later work had stopped in the whole building. The current was being cut off bit by bit. At eleven the current was cut off at

[1] This, like Jacques's story of the second stay-in strike, first appeared in a slightly abridged form in the *Manchester Guardian*. The introductory part is also printed here as it was written at the time.

the power-station. In my particular section there are eight hundred chaps. At nine o'clock one of the Communists went round saying to us: "Comrades, we must join forces to get the forty-hour working week and a paid fortnight's holiday. There is no reason why we shouldn't get holidays just like the office employees, who don't work nearly as hard as we do. We must also see that we get our wages increased by fifty to seventy-five centimes an hour.' The other demands included the dismissal of married women whose husbands worked in the factory; no reprisals against the strikers; shower-baths and better lavatories. And, naturally, we must also insist on getting a collective contract.

'Now I must say that between nine and eleven many of us did not know what to do. The young chaps were specially nervous: what if we were to go on strike, and then be the first to get the sack? We waited to see if anybody would not follow the strike movement. But as everybody stopped work we naturally did the same.

'At eleven o'clock it was agreed that every team – there are thirty to forty workers in each – appoint two delegates. These delegates went that day to the meeting at the Labour Exchange. But nothing was settled that day.

'The rest of us stayed in the works, with the exception of three or four men in each team who were sent out to get wine and beer, and bread and sausage; – for there was, naturally, no food on the premises. They had their cards taken away by the pickets, who gave them back when they returned with the provisions. Apart from these chaps, no worker could get out of the factory. It was quite a job to get permission even to go across the street to telephone – for I had to tell them at home I might not get back for the night.

'The real fun at the factory started about one o'clock, after we'd got our helpings of bread and wine and sausage. I must say that the strike had come quite unexpectedly, and it was a terrible blow to the restaurants around the works, who had prepared, as usual, the thousands of lunches for the workers. In this weather much of the food was wasted. Nearly all the people at the works lunch at these restaurants. The four-course lunch for seven francs is quite good. But after our improvised lunch inside the factory that day we had nothing

to do, and to while the time away, we arranged dances in several parts of the works. There were among us a cornet player and a violin player, and another chap had brought a concertina. We built up a platform with packing-cases for the "orchestra". In other parts of the works they put on the wireless, or had a gramophone to play dance music. Couples of men and women, and couples of men (for there weren't enough girls to go round) danced all over the place, among the vans, and among the piles of scrap-iron. At two o'clock we held a grand procession from the works down to the island on the Seine. This island, which is part of the Renault works, is over a kilometre long, has railway-lines on it and a track for testing cars. It is connected with the mainland by a bridge and an underground tunnel. The workers that day felt very much at home. Many of us kept saying: "To-day, at any rate, we are the masters." We had found a lot of red signalling-flags among the railway material on the island; and we helped ourselves to them, and the Communists drew the hammer and sickle on them in chalk. We used them in the procession. Twelve thousand of us must have marched in the procession, roaring and screaming (for the women were the most vociferous of all) – *"Les Soviets partout!"* and *"Vacances payées!"* and *"A bas le Seigneur!"* – meaning M. Renault – and singing the Internationale and the Carmagnole and the Marseillaise. Women and everybody else wore their blue overalls. It was a tremendous procession, and went on for about four hours. When I got back to my own workshop there was still no reply; and it was obvious that we would have to stay the night. Nobody could get away, except, as I already said, to telephone; and even the foremen and engineers were not allowed to leave. They all looked very glum, and whispered to each other in corners. The chief engineer looked particularly fed up, for he is held responsible for the timely delivery of the army orders. He kept scratching his head and telephoning in great agitation all day long. Still, there was no trouble anywhere. The striker's watchword was "Calm", a word written in chalk all over the place – over the walls and doors and motor-vans and machinery.

'It got rather rowdier as time went on, but it was not very serious either. In the evening the factory was invaded by men

selling the *Paris-Soir*, in which we were able to read all about the strike; and at the entrance any number of local tradesmen had assembled with baskets of food and cases of wine and beer. The strikers' delegates bought up all the stuff in no time. There was no bread left in the bakeries at Billancourt, and no cigarettes in the tobacco-shops – and the "delegates" had to be sent to Paris in taxis to get both bread and cigarettes. That day M. Renault's "no-smoking" regulations were overlooked with a vengeance. We were the masters.

'At night the dancing started again all over the place. Many of the fellows had got extremely drunk by this time; and there were many fights – not political fights, but about the girls. There was also one drunkard who fell off a ladder, and had to be carried to the infirmary. "He is spitting blood!" somebody cried in alarm. But it was only red wine. We spent the evening dancing and singing, and readings newspapers, and playing cards and discussing the "situation" – and drinking a great deal. Some of the couples went off to the island for some quiet fun.

'It was not easy to find a comfortable place to sleep in. Many lay down simply on the ground. None of us, of course, had any blanket or pillow or anything. Others got into the army vans and lorries, and railway-carriages on the island; one of our chaps slept in the open air inside a tank; and although we had received strict orders not to damage any property, we could not resist the temptation – in spite of our dirty overalls – to get into the brand new touring-cars. A few drunks who had got into the cars for the night were sick all over them – it was unfortunate. I lay in my car, more comfortable than many others, but not very happy. I was shivering with cold, and I could not sleep; for every other moment somebody would burst into song – the Internationale or *Tout va très bien Madame la Marquise*. Still, I had the pleasant feeling of being one of the lords and masters of Renault's.

'We did not feel very well the next morning. At six o'clock we were allowed to go out to have coffee in a neighbouring café; or if we preferred, we could help ourselves to the large cans of free coffee and bread the Communist municipality of Boulogne had sent to the works. We felt bored and tired that morning. We sat in the sun trying to get some heat into us.

At noon we again went out for lunch, going through the usual control by the pickets. In the afternoon we again danced, though without the same gusto. In the meantime, the workmen's wives had brought them their wireless sets, as well as blankets for the next night, and thermos flasks and bedroom slippers and what not. We had no idea how long the "stay-in" strike would last. One of our chaps had two whole joints brought to him – enough to last him a fortnight. Women carrying babies, and crowds of children came into the works, which they had never seen before, and inspected everything with a landlordly air.

'In the meantime negotiations were continuing somewhere. But at five still nothing was known. By six, many of the people were getting impatient – especially as we were on the eve of the Whitsun holiday. Many said they would go home to-night. The three days' Whitsun holiday was perhaps decisive; many said that Renault wouldn't have "got off so easily" otherwise. Otherwise they would "have hung on for a month". The same chap who announced the beginning of the strike, also told us at seven that the strike was over. Renault had promised that there would be no reprisals; he had promised to increase the wages of the women earning less than four francs an hour; part of the strike time would be paid for; and he also promised to examine the strikers' other demands in a broad-minded spirit, and would give a reply as soon as possible. The strike, he said, "must stop, or else the works will be evacuated by force".

'Fortunately,' Jacques said, 'it didn't come to that. If the police had come in to drive us out, there would have been murder let loose; and the plant would have been smashed to pieces.

'As soon as the agreement was reached, the bosses recovered their authority, and one of them ordered me to sweep up the banana skins and other rubbish. The result of the strike was really negligible, and most of us wouldn't have yielded but for the Whitsun week-end. There are some Croix de Feu chaps among us, but they supported the strikers, and said La Rocque considered their demands perfectly just and legitimate.

'We have lost money over this strike,' Jacques concluded,

'but so also has Renault. He must have lost several millions. If nothing happens in a fortnight, the strike may start again. Our people are determined to get the forty-hour working week. They want to get for forty hours what they now get for forty-eight hours. In principle they are also opposed to overtime. In the armaments section some of us work up to fourteen hours a day; the qualified workers make anything up to 2,000 francs a month; and perhaps even more; but it's tiring and the principle is wrong. In the other sections – such as motor-cars – they work perhaps only five hours a day. Many of the workers agree that the demands made by the strikers were really excessive – you can't ask for everything all at once. But everybody agrees that, as an experiment, the strike was well worth trying out. And if Renault tries to cheat, we'll start again – in a fortnight, or perhaps even sooner.'

. . . . . .

What happened at Renault's happened, on a smaller scale, in numerous other works of the Paris area. On Friday, May 29, about 70,000 men were on strike in the Paris area alone – the strike had not yet spread to any appreciable extent to the provinces. The workers' demands varied from place to place; in many small factories the demands were scribbled in pencil on a scrap of paper by an improvised strikers' committee – and while in some works the demands (concerning wages, working hours, or such things as 'a litre of milk a day to metal polishers doing work injurious to their health') were of a local character, in most of the works the demands related to wider issues – collective bargaining, the forty-hour week, holidays with pay, recognition of workers' delegates chosen by the men themselves.

The Press of the Right was much perturbed; 'they are asking for things that can be given them only by an Act of Parliament,' the *Intransigeant* wailed; 'the employers simply don't know what to reply to such demands.' But with a sound instinct, the working class knew that *now* was the time to bring pressure to bear on Parliament. It was a propitious moment. Blum had been showing signs of weakness – had he not, on May 10, started his pre-governmental career by – reassuring the bankers? His government must be forced – or

helped, as the case may be – to push through Parliament the essential Labour clauses of the Front Populaire programme, not gradually (as he had announced on May 10) but quickly.

And there was also the question of wages. Between 1930 and 1935 the total wage-bill of France had fallen by thirty per cent. In 1935 the wages – following the general policy of deflation – had declined still further; and the French working class had been patiently waiting for an opportunity to reverse the tendency. Apart from that, there is no doubt that in certain industries – especially in the Paris engineering industry – the workers showed a genuine revolutionary spirit, and there is at least some truth in Trotsky's ironical comment on the claims made by Jouhaux, the trade union leader, and Léon Blum, that the strikes were 'of a purely economic order'. 'No doubt,' Trotsky ironically says, mimicking the French Labour leaders, 'the strikers were masters of the factories while the strike was on, and were in control of the property and the management of the factories. But one ought to close one's eyes on such a regrettable "detail". On the whole the strikes are economic and not political.' The 'regrettable detail' was going to give the Blum Government many sleepless nights for months to come.

As already said, the strikes subsided during the Whitsun week-end; but, as could have been expected, they began to spread rapidly again on the following Tuesday, June 2. It was psychologically inevitable. During the Whitsun week-end, only some fifteen Paris factories with a total of some 5,000 strikers had remained 'occupied'; but by Tuesday strikes had broken out in seventy or eighty new concerns. Nearly all the engineering works – including aeroplane, motor and electrical engineering works, where there had been no strike during the previous week – joined in the movement. At Renault's and Citroën's where the strike was 'provisionally' settled on the previous Friday, work was resumed; but the workers were in a state of effervescence and it was felt that the strikes might start again at any moment. What is more, the strike movement which during the previous week was almost entirely limited to the Paris area, now began to spread to the provincial centres.

By June 3, the number of strikers in the Paris area was

estimated at 350,000. The extent of the strike was shown by the number and the different types of trade affected: Coty's perfumery workshop; all the chocolate factories; Hachette's organisation for distributing newspapers; Hotchkiss; Thomson-Houston; Peugeot repair shops; motor works, aeroplane works, printers, oil distillers, paper mills, cleaners, cement workers, builders, biscuit factories, etc. The drivers of the Black Marias struck and prison vans had to be driven by police inspectors. The C.G.T. in a helpless-sounding note stated that 'it did not forget the duties of the working class as far as the provisioning of children, old people and the sick was concerned'. There were rumours of a food shortage, and the C.G.T. statement sounded anything but reassuring. In a number of factories, the strikers 'imprisoned' the directors and managers. Among these 'prisoners' were seventeen Englishmen in the Huntley and Palmers biscuit factory at La Courneuve. Mr. Hart, one of the directors, whom I saw a few days later, spoke of his experience with much good humour; and declared that he would easily have come to an agreement with the strikers, with whom he was on perfectly friendly terms, but for the constant interference of the local Communist deputy, who urged them not to give way. 'There were a few nasty moments,' he said, 'but it might have been worse.'

On June 4 the strike continued to spread like an epidemic. It was obvious that, in spite of some occasional interference by Communist deputies here and there, the strike was spontaneous and was simply spreading by contagion. There were rumours of a general strike, involving railways and other transport, gas and electricity. This, however, seemed improbable for two reasons; the transport workers belonged to the C.G.T. and the C.G.T. would not have welcomed a form of strike which would have had the immediate effect of turning public opinion against the strikers; and the workers were indeed perfectly aware of this danger themselves; – for, since the strikes were not affecting the ordinary citizen's elementary comforts, public opinion was, in the main, sympathetic to the strike movement. Secondly, a general strike is a highly organised thing and the strike movement was spontaneous and without any real co-ordination. Over the large majority

of the strikers the C.G.T. had no control, for they did not belong to it.

Nevertheless, Paris lived through some anxious moments on June 4 and the following days. On June 4 the ordinary citizen began to experience the first effects of the strike when, in the morning, he found that his newsagent had only a very limited supply of newspapers to sell. Later, he also learned that the Halles had got into a state of complete disorder during the night, the lorry-drivers having refused to take delivery of the goods at the Paris railway termini. Hundreds of tons of fish and vegetables remained piled up for hours at the stations until the railway companies themselves decided to transport the goods to the Halles. There was great confusion among sellers and buyers, and some of the more perishable goods like strawberries were wasted. But, at any rate, Paris did not go hungry that day.

Even so, the developments at the Halles had caused something of a panic among housewives, especially in the bourgeois quarters, who began to buy up large quantities of flour, macaroni, tinned milk and other tinned food. The hoarding took on such proportions that a food shop like Couté's in the Boulevard Raspail was completely emptied by the end of the afternoon. A strike also broke out in the petrol trade, and the distribution of motor fuel was suspended almost everywhere. Numerous petrol stations closed down, and the traffic in Paris became noticeably thinner towards the evening. Taxi-drivers doubted whether they would have enough petrol to carry on the next day.

The strike of the Messageries Hachette became general. Most of the copies of *Paris-Midi* remained unsold that day. The men of the distributing organisation of *Paris-Soir* went on strike out of sympathy for Hachette's men. That evening I found the dispatch-room of the *Paris-Soir* offices occupied by strikers, many of whom lay about aimlessly on large piles of 'unsolds', and the entrance was guarded by pickets. The van-drivers and cyclists were asking for a twenty per cent increase – from forty to fifty francs a day – roughly the same increase as that asked for in most trades affected by the strike. They were also asking for a collective contract and holidays with pay. Round the Faubourg Montmartre, the newspaper

centre, numerous empty green vans belonging to Hachette's lined the pavements. Everything continued to pass in a perfectly calm – and, as far as the strikers themselves were concerned – good-natured atmosphere.

That afternoon, the negotiations between the workers and the employers of the engineering industry, where a provisional agreement had been reached during the previous week, were broken off by the employers, and that very evening the Renault works were 'reoccupied'. At the same time it was reported – which was reassuring – that the petrol and food transport strikes were on the point of being settled. That was the night on which the Blum Government took office.

Alas! there were no papers on the following day to announce the formation of the new government – except the *Populaire*, the *Humanité* and the indefatigable *Action Française*. Owing to the strike in the Messageries Hachette, the newspaper proprietors had decided not to go to press. In the circumstances copies of the only three papers that had come out were not easy to obtain. The kiosks were on strike and the papers were sold only by amateur newsvendors. I bought a copy of the *Action Française* near the Opéra from an old gentleman looking like a retired Colonel. The principal theme of the Royalist sheet was that France was now 'ruled by the Jews'.

The motor traffic was not much different from the night before; for although the petrol strike had not yet been settled, it was known that the government was making a special effort to reach a prompt agreement. At a few petrol stations petrol could still be bought at almost double the normal price.

The government was also working hard to settle the strike at the abattoirs that had broken out that morning. M. Salengro, the new Minister of the Interior, had a meeting with M. Jouhaux, the Secretary-General of the C.G.T.; but M. Jouhaux declared that as most of the strikers were non-union, he had no control over most of them. But he promised, at any rate, to restrain the railway men. The most spectacular new development was the extension of the strikes to the Grands Magasins, most of which, including the Galeries Lafayette, the Louvre, the Samaritaine and the Trois Quartiers were declared to be occupied that morning. At the Galeries Lafayette a notice was displayed in the windows with a large

title: 'Prostitution or Hospital for Consumptives?' It spoke of the sweated female labour in the big shops, and appealed for the moral support of the general public. I was allowed by the pickets to enter the Galeries Lafayette. The men and women were assembled on the ground floor of the shop; and were discussing the terms they had proposed to the management: respect of trade union right; recognition of workers' delegates; no reprisals against the strikers; no overtime, minimum wages roughly fifty to seventy-five per cent higher than their present wages; and better food.

The young girls were visibly enjoying the strike as a novel experience; but declared, with a touch of grimness that it was high time they got better food and better wages. Some of them were earning no more than 400 francs a month. One of the assistants produced a note-book and proceeded to explain, with much excitement, that he had earned only 512 francs last month. 'And in addition to it all, the management expect you to be well dressed and to have a clean shirt and collar.' The strike, I was told, had started spontaneously that morning without any instructions from the C.G.T. or anybody else. But the staff had since asked the C.G.T. to send someone along to discuss the situation with them; and nearly everybody was going to join the C.G.T. now.

I also drove that day to the Renault works at Billancourt, where I was allowed into the offices of the strike committee, but not into the works. There were two women and four men in the committee-room. These people had a grim, determined and revolutionary air – rather like a Jacobin club, I thought – or a Soviet. The employers' Syndicate, they said, had broken off negotiations the day before; and it did not matter any more what this Syndicate did. These people were not to be trusted. So the strikers' committee had made up its mind to get an agreement out of M. Renault personally. It was no good relying on a Syndicate, or even on an act of Parliament, such as Blum had promised; for 'such laws are not always observed anyway'. 'We wish the Blum Government well,' one of the committee members said, 'but we know that he will never overcome the resistance of the Senate unless he is supported and pushed by the working class.' The strike at Renault's last week, he said, had begun in 'anarchical con-

ditions', but now everything was being managed by the strikers' delegates. Half the strikers were now sent home for twenty-four hours, and the change-over took place at noon; and no women were allowed to stay in the works overnight. The property was being treated with the utmost care, and it was strictly forbidden to sleep in new motor-cars. I waited for my old friend Jacques to give me fuller details; but did not see him until several days later. But the story he had to tell (as will be seen) was even more exciting than the first one.

That day, June 5, Léon Blum, the new Premier, made his first broadcast speech. He appealed to the workers to observe discipline and to the employers to treat the dispute in a broad-minded spirit. He warned the people against rumours spread by mischievous commentators, and appealed for calm. He believed in the great future of French democracy.

But this broadcast (naturally) did not put an end to the strikes, and when the Blum Government appeared for the first time before the Chamber on the following day, Saturday, June 6, over a million people were on strike in France. After Renault, Citroën was 'reoccupied', and new strikes were reported from every part of the country. Here and there, a few strikes were being settled, but only to be replaced by several others.

The industrial districts of Paris and of the *banlieue* were an extraordinary sight during those days. Building after building – small factories and large factories, and even comparatively small workshops – were flying red, or red and tricolour flags – with pickets in front of the closed gates. Many of them had collection boxes ('For the Strikers') outside, some with tricolour ribbons round them.

A picket outside a small factory in the rue Broca said to me one day: 'We've been occupying the factory for ten days now. Our boss said to us this morning: "This is getting a bit thick. You are behaving like a lot of dictators." So I said to him: "We'd rather have this sort of dictatorship in the framework of the Republic – *dans le cadre républicain* – than Hitler or Mussolini."' The phrase was a little illogical; but it reflected a curious belief in the creation of a new planned economy and of an authoritative form of government – with a preponderant influence of the working class.

The strikes continued on a large scale right into the middle of June – in spite of the famous Matignon Agreement[1] signed on the night of June 7. The coal strike broke out, as arranged, on the following day; and the rubber and tyre industries at Clermont Ferrand also became involved. On June 11, there was a strike of the hotel and restaurant employees in Paris, and for the first time the town swarmed with alarmist rumours of a Fascist or Communist *coup*. M. Jacques Bardoux later published an altogether preposterous story about a Communist plot to seize power that night.

The claims of the railwaymen and bank clerks were among the few to be settled without a strike; and, with a sound instinct, the public services never ceased work. It was important not to antagonise the general public – though some writers of the Right later claimed that Moscow had given special instructions to the government employees and municipal workers of France.[2]

As already said, the stay-in strike at the great Renault works, after being provisionally settled on the eve of the Whitsun week-end, broke out again a few days later. It was while this second strike was in progress, that Jacques gave me another account of what was happening. He looked rather thin and tired and his voice was husky. 'It is no fun,' he said, 'sleeping in such a draught.'

Jacques's Second Story

'No sooner had it become known that the negotiations were broken off than at six o'clock on Thursday evening we stopped work and occupied the premises. The order to do so came from the strikers' committee – the one that had been set up during the previous week. The management were taken by surprise; for apparently they thought that we would go home, with the intention of occupying the works the next morning, and that in the meantime they could lock up the works and let no one get in. They were well done in the eye!

'The second strike has now gone on for over a week, and we still don't know where we stand. Everything is in the hands of the strikers' committee, and they don't tell us much

[1] See next Chapter.
[2] *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, July 10, 1936, p. 20.

of what is going on outside. It seems that Renault has not agreed to our demands for a rise in wages, and although most of us would like to get back to work – for this occupation of the factories is really no fun in the long run – our chaps are determined to hang on for a month if they get no satisfaction. There has been some talk about the "Matignon Agreement" between the owners and the C.G.T., but we can't quite make out whether either Renault or our strikers' committee have accepted it. There seems to be a catch somewhere. We've got to get Renault to climb down.

'The whole organisation of the stay-in strike is much more thorough now than it was during the first two-day strike. Frankly, it's pretty well like being inside a prison. Half the workers are allowed to go home at midday but they must be back at 11.30 the next morning, and heaven help them if they don't turn up. Little André in my team who stayed away for two days went through a real court-martial. When he came back that morning he produced a doctor's certificate. But the strike committee thought there was something wrong with it, and made inquiries at his house, and found that it was all lies. He had not been home since he had left the factory; and his wife was in a frightful rage when she heard he'd simply been on the batter with a *poule*; she thought he had been at Renault's all the time.

'At the court-martial he was as white as a sheet, and was proclaimed a coward and a traitor, and was chased out of the factory ignominiously as a false brother, and a dirty Croix de Feu. Afterwards they hung up a picture of him with a pig's head. No; we are not going to have anything to do with traitors.

'For those workers who left the factory, and will not take part in the strike, we have built coffins with their names written on them. One of our chaps is in charge of the candles burning on the coffins, and we have made wreaths of scrap iron and have painted a cross on them in white paint, and "eternal regrets" and the traitor's name. Other chaps impersonate nuns and pray over the coffins at night, and a choir, accompanied by a concertina – it sounds just like an organ – chants wailful Ave Marias over the traitors' coffins. One of our fellows, who got hold somewhere of a real lace surplice, impersonates the priest.

'Our fellows certainly don't lack imagination in trying to keep the strikers from being bored. So much goes on every day that one hasn't even time to read a paper. Especially in the evening there is always something on. One evening we had a cinema show; another evening a crowd of variety artists came to play and sing to us. We hired a piano for fifty francs at Boulogne that day. The pianist was the very image of Paul-Boncour, and the singers' voices weren't too good, or perhaps the acoustics of the factory were all wrong – but anyway it was great fun. Unfortunately we left the piano out in the rain for the night – but I don't think it mattered. It was a rotten old piano, anyway. We made a collection for the artists, and they were very pleased.

'We also have boxing matches – two professional boxers came to see us one night; and we've also had cycle races; and the other day Ladoumegue, the famous runner, came to see us, and we had a grand time with him. We also play football during the day – and there are plenty of broken windows as a result.

'One of the best shows we put up was the mock trial of Colonel de la Rocque. If only you could have seen La Rocque locked up in a big cage, resting on two broomsticks, with heavy chains on his wrists, crying: "Pity me! Pity me!" He was hauled before a court-martial, but as he said nothing but "pity me! pity me!" he was condemned to death. A dummy of La Rocque, with Swastika and Croix de Feu armlets was then hanged and burned, and the ashes, followed by a couple of "priests", were paraded through the works.

'Dancing and singing and processions go on most of the day. There must be about 150 wireless sets at Renault's now. On the notice-board one can see such notices as "Thanks to Comrade So-and-so for the loan of his wireless set, which delights the comrades of workshop No. 22". But for the dancing, we have our violin and clarinet and concertina players – we've got several orchestras in the place.

'I must say that it is all much more orderly than during the first strike. At five o'clock every morning we are wakened by a clarion call and at midnight the clarion sounds the curfew. Every morning the factory is scrubbed and cleaned so that by seven o'clock it all looks spick and span. The

machinery alone is not touched – and it will need a good deal of polishing and oiling before work starts again.

'The sleeping arrangements are much better than they were at first. Tents have been put up; – these are called "clubs" – the tent in my section is called "The Club of the Leaking Radiator" – and we have put up coal braziers to keep warm. There are also plenty of blankets. Some of us are allowed to sleep in cars and motor-coaches but we have to guarantee to keep them perfectly clean. At night, the firemen make three rounds to see that everything is in order.

'The women, and the youngsters under eighteen are all sent home for the night. The only women to stay the night are a few old grandmothers, who fry chips for us. Funny old women they are with faces as red as tomatoes. They say their faces are so red because they have been frying chips all their lives. The workshops are decorated with endless banners with the hammer and sickle and "La Rocque au poteau", and many pictures – we have a big picture of Léon Blum in our workshop inscribed "Léon Blum our saviour". There are other, less flattering, portraits of Hitler and Mussolini – you should see what ugly snouts they've both been given by our artists; – and mind you they are pretty good artists!

'When I say that Renault's is like a prison, I mean that one can't possibly get out. I had a row with one of the chaps on the strikers' committee – for he and his friends go out as much as they like but nobody else has a ghost of a chance of getting out during the twenty-four hours' shift – except for half an hour in the morning, to get a coffee. On the whole, everything is calm and orderly. We are not supposed to bring in any drink except beer and cider; – but most of us put white wine in the beer bottles, and really quite a lot of wine is smuggled in that way. There are a couple of old fogies in my team who manage to get blind drunk at night.

'The bread is brought in by Renault lorries marked "Strike Committee of the Renault Works"; but as the change-over takes place between 11.30 and 12, both those going out and coming in get their chief meal outside, and most of us bring in a cold meal for the night; some of us, however, bring in spirit lamps on which we fry a steak or a cutlet.

'The foremen are with us, but we don't talk much to them,

and never invite them to a game of cards. They are very bored and miserable. Some of the engineers also stay inside the factory, but we don't bother about them. When a policeman – dressed in plain clothes – tried one day to smuggle himself into the works, no doubt to spy on us, he was soon recognised and thrown out into the street with a good *coup de pied dans le derrière.*

'There are, of course, plenty of spies inside the factory, and you have to be careful in talking to people you don't know. There are about 6,000 Croix de Feu chaps among us – but while they claim to support the strike movement, they keep aloof, and don't sing the Internationale.

'An interesting development of the last few days has been the enlistment in the C.G.T.; – nearly everybody (except, I suppose, the Croix de Feu chaps) are now trade union members. But to what extent the strikers' committee and the C.G.T. are working in close harmony, I am not quite sure. The strikers' committee is, of course, made up of the red-hot extremists – more extreme, I am told, than even the Communist deputies.

'On the whole, I think most of the workers would like to see the strike end quickly – for it is rather tiring, in spite of it all. But at present we are the masters. And it is strange to think that in a few days everything may go back to "normal", and Renault will come into his own again. And the posters and drawings, and flags, and wireless sets and everything will have gone. Again the engines will start turning and again the foreman will be able to order you about, and glare.'

. . . . . .

An interesting point in this account is that the strikers' committee at Renault virtually ignored for several days the Matignon Agreement negotiated by the C.G.T. – and that despite the fact that nearly all the workers of Renault's, including, no doubt, the members of the strikers' committee, had by this time become members of the C.G.T.

It was about June 12 that the strikes definitely began to subside, after reaching a record of over a million simultaneous strikers. The Matignon Agreement on June 7 had, if not an immediate, still a decisive effect on the strikes. It was hailed

by the C.G.T. as the greatest victory in the History of French Trade Unionism; – though the fact that the strike continued on a large scale, even after the Matignon Agreement, showed that the C.G.T. – in spite of its membership which had increased, in a fortnight, from one and a half to nearly three million – had not yet achieved anything resembling full control of the strike movement.

It was curious how the C.G.T. on the one hand, and the Communists on the other, later claimed full credit for the strikes.

The truth is that about June 7 the Communist leaders themselves were becoming greatly alarmed by the extent of the strikes. Communist deputies could be heard complaining: '*Nous sommes débordés.*' Others blamed the Trotskyists for it; – though as a Socialist deputy from Marseilles remarked, in attacking the Communists some days later, 'there aren't ten Trotskyists in the whole of Marseilles'. And on June 10 M. Maurice Thorez, the Communist leader, himself proclaimed that 'it is important to know when to stop a strike; for otherwise one is apt to play into the hands of the reactionaries'. And another Communist deputy who ventured to preach moderation to the strikers of a big engineering works was howled down.

Still when, about the middle of June, the great strike wave was over – though some important strikes, such as that of the Paris department stores, was still to continue for days, and others for weeks afterwards – the Communist leaders assumed the role of the Great Victors. Maurice Thorez, referring to the stay-in method, proclaimed 'a new legality', and said that if the workers took good care of the plant during the stay-in strikes it was because, 'the factories would soon be the property of the workers, anyway'.

On Sunday, June 14 – a day when the slightly-reassured bourgeoisie went to the great race-meeting at Chantilly – the Communists held a *Fête de la Victoire* in the Stade Buffalo at Montrouge. It was, in its own way, the most impressive thing I had ever seen in Paris. The vast Front Populaire processions of the past had been impressive enough; but their pageantry, if pageantry it may be called, had been left to individual initiative, and there was a notable lack of organisation

in the arrangement of banners and other colour effects. But at Montrouge that day there was an organising hand behind everything. For everything had obviously been thought out in advance. The method of it all was reminiscent of Moscow, not to say Berlin.

Over a hundred thousand people must have been there, half crowding the tribunes of the giant stadium, and the other half standing in the sunny arena. From the roofs of the tribunes enormous flags were hung, red flags alternating with the tricolour. The two ends of the stadium were decorated with vast banners with 'A free, strong, and happy France' written in giant lettering.

It was a well-disciplined and good-humoured crowd, with just a slight Parisian touch of toughness and defiance. There were many women and children. Everybody was wearing a red-paper flower or some other 'red' emblem. The stewards, muscular young men in white shirts and bright red ties, were friendly and courteous, if not very expert at their job.

The speakers' platform, with its elaborate loud-speaker arrangements, was decorated with a vast picture of the late Henri Barbusse. By three o'clock the stadium and the arena were packed with people. A raised gangway leading up to the platform split the arena in two. To the left of the platform was the band which played the Internationale, the *Jeune Garde, Le Dix-Septième*, and other revolutionary songs.

Shortly after three o'clock a procession of the strikers' committees began. They were loudly cheered by the enormous crowds on either side as they walked down the central gangway with their banners. First came the 'victorious men' of Hachette's; then the men of another firm carrying a banner with 'Victory after ten days' strike' on it; then scores of others with banners saying, 'Victory after a four-day strike' or 'Thirteenth district of Paris – 120 disputes, 50 victories. The other battles must also be won'; 'A free, strong, and happy France,' and so on. *'Les Soviets partout!'* the people shouted.

The greatest enthusiasm was aroused by the appearance on the gangway of the strike committee of Renault's carrying a banner combining the Socialist, Communist, and Republican emblems and saying, 'We won because we were united.' At the head of them marched M. Costes, the Communist deputy

for Boulogne, with a tricolour ribbon across his chest. The women wore red scarves.

A little later a giant disk with the hammer and sickle was carried triumphantly down the gangway towards the platform, followed by the members of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party. Among them was also M. Zyromsky, the leader of the Socialist Left Wing.

And then suddenly a dramatic thing happened. Four immense flags in the middle of the stadium were hoisted up the flagpoles, and as they unfurled in the wind one realised that each of them was the newly devised national flag of Soviet France – a red flag with the Tricolour in a top corner and a golden R.F. (*République Française*) on the red field, with the Communist hammer and sickle between the two letters. With these flags fluttering in the sun, and these banners, and these processions of the Communist leaders and militants, and the surging crowd of over 100,000 people, one suddenly had a strange vision of a new France in the making.

An impressive one minute's silence was observed in memory of the twenty-two victims of Fascism who had fallen in street fights in the last two years and whose names were read out by one of the speakers. A drum was beaten after each name, and after the minute's silence the band played the official funeral march of Soviet Russia. It played this march in memory of the 'victims of Fascism' – for in the great strikes – the greatest labour upheaval in the history of France – not a single life had been lost.[1]

[1] It deserves to be recorded that a certain pro-Fascist section of the British Press – particularly the Rothermere papers – used the French strikes of June 1936 as an opportunity for treating France as a hot-bed of anarchy in Europe. The international implications of this campaign are easy to guess. On June 21, when the strikes had already subsided, and Paris was perfectly peaceful, the *Sunday Dispatch* produced the most bloodcurdling stories of bloodshed and rape under the following enormous front-page headlines: FRANCE AND BELGIUM RAPIDLY GOING RED. SCENES OF HORROR, RIOTING, BLOODSHED AND MISERY. TOURISTS IN FEAR OF THEIR LIVES.

The Premier's office very aptly published the following *communiqué*: 'The French Government cannot allow the publication of such flagrant lies in a friendly country to pass without making a categorical protest at once. No signs of either horror or violence have occurred in Paris during the last weeks. There has been no rioting in France. The French Government is convinced that such perversion of language will find nowhere severer judges than in Great Britain.'

With the exception of an irresponsible minority, the Committee of the Anglo-American Press Association in Paris strongly condemned the publication of such 'news'.

'Only in a country that is both disciplined and democratic could such a thing have happened,' the *Œuvre* remarked.

And looking back on the great strike, old Charles Rappoport, the little Marxist gnome, could be heard growling in the Chamber lobbies – 'Blum, Thorez, Jouhaux – pouf! *Mais le peuple – le peuple a toujours raison.*'

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT THE WORKERS GAINED

THE Blum Government made its first appearance before the Chamber on Saturday, June 6, in an atmosphere that was heavy with anxiety. About a million workers were on strike that day, and the strikes were continuing to spread. *'Nous sommes débordés,'* the Communist deputies in the lobbies wailed. The Radicals were terrified out of their wits. Blum, if anything, kept his head above water better than the rest.

The Chamber was crowded, and in the public galleries there were many well-dressed women, who had come to witness the historical scene of three women taking their seats on the government bench.

At three o'clock M. Blum, followed by his ministers, entered. The Socialists, Communists, and the greater part of the Radicals stood up and cheered loudly, while the man who had been for seventeen years the Leader of the Opposition sat down on the front government bench with M. Delbos, the Foreign Minister, and M. Salengro, the Minister of the Interior, beside him.

Immediately behind him sat the three women Under-Secretaries – Madame Lacore, the tall white-haired Socialist schoolmistress, Madame Brunschwicg, and Madame Joliot-Curie.

M. Herriot, wearing the traditional evening dress, was in the Speaker's chair. (He had just solved the problem of holding an important place in the Republic without having actively to support the new government by getting himself elected President of the Chamber.) M. Blum mounted the tribune and read out the Ministerial declaration in his high-pitched and rather weak voice. Several passages, particularly those relating to the defence of the democratic liberties of the country, the statement that 'this government has its majority',

and the list of bills to be tabled before the Chamber during the following week, were loudly cheered by the Socialists and Communists and part of the Radicals. He said:

> 'The government does not need to state its programme. Its programme is that of the Front Populaire, agreed to by all the parties that constitute the majority. The government will apply in rapid succession the measures contained in the Front Populaire programme, for it is only from the converging effect of all these measures that the government can expect the moral and material change that the country is demanding from it.'

After enumerating the first set of measures to be submitted to Parliament – including the three great labour reforms – the Ministerial declaration went on to say, with reference to the Fascist Leagues, that the Republic would be defended 'with a vigour proportionate to the danger and the resistance with which it will be faced'.

On the all-important monetary question M. Blum said that the policy of deflation pursued by the last Parliament had proved a failure. It was necessary to adopt a new policy which, instead of contracting consumption, would increase it. But this would not be done by means of devaluation; *there would be no monetary coup d'état.*

> 'The essence of our policy will be,' M. Blum said, 'to try, through the great credit that the country will open to itself, to obtain by more healthy methods, and perhaps with more stable results, the improvements that other countries obtained by means of monetary devaluation.'

This pledge not to resort to a 'monetary *coup d'état*' was one of the most extraordinary statements made by M. Blum that day. M. Paul Reynaud sharply criticised the statement, and warned the government that if it did not devalue at once, it would have to do so later 'in much less favourable circumstances'.

But what was being awaited with the greatest interest of all was M. Blum's statement on the strikes. Opposition speakers had protested violently against the illegality of the stay-in strike, and the government's failure to take any action.

What was going to be Blum's reply?

> 'The situation,' he said, 'is a serious one; but we must not lose our heads. You know the real causes of this strike move-

ment. The fundamental cause is the economic crisis, and its long duration. The results of this crisis have been unemployment, a fall in wages, a deterioration of labour conditions, and a change in the relations between employers and wage-earners. Such changes take place whenever the supply of labour greatly exceeds the demand. There has been a fall in wages, and for some time past, a rise in the cost of living. Foodstuffs, in particular, have risen in price, and with wages falling during the last four years, life has become very difficult. In the case of the engineering industry another cause of the strike has been the persistent refusal of the employers to come into any contact with the labour organisations. The workers' grievances are of long standing; and it is not surprising that the workers should have believed that, since the last election, their demands would be given a better reception. Anyone who has any experience of the workers knows that one can never dissociate completely their direct action from their political action.'

Turning to the question of the stay-in strikes, M. Blum said:

'The movement has spread, and has become a mass movement. It has sometimes exceeded the limits of trade union action. It has taken a peculiar form, but one which is not perhaps as new as is supposed; for eighteen months ago we witnessed in the Nord a phenomenon which, in my opinion, has been inaccurately described as factory occupation (for no factory has ever been occupied from outside), and which may be more accurately described as a stay-in method (*l'installation dans l'usine*). (Ironical laughter on Right.)

'I have been asked,' M. Blum continued, 'whether I regarded these factory occupations as legal. *No, I do not consider them legal. These occupations are not in agreement with the rules and principles of French civil law.* But what conclusion do you expect me to draw from this statement?

'The employers, the factory owners, have not asked that the factories be cleared by force. Far from it! In the first letters they addressed to the government they formally excluded such a possibility. They did not even insist upon the premises being cleared as a preliminary condition to entering into negotiations with the labour organisations. (Turning to the Opposition.) Do you wish me to evacuate the factories by armed force? Is that what you mean?' (Loud cheers on the Left.)

After various interruptions from the Right, M. Blum went on:

'If you wish me to put the police in motion, and perhaps soon afterwards the army, and who knows, gentlemen? – perhaps

also some of those Leagues which at the present moment are stirring up labour trouble, but which, before long, may volunteer to act as an auxiliary corps for purposes of repression –'

M. Augustin Michel (Right): 'We never said that!'

M. Blum: '– If that is what you expect from the government, I must tell you that you will wait in vain. I shall tell you what must be at present, in my opinion, the government's action.'

This action, he concluded, consisted of three things: the government must see to it that there must be no disturbance in the public services and in the food supply; it must make every effort to terminate the strikes by conciliation and arbitration; and it must present to the Chamber without delay a number of labour Bills which, it hoped, would hasten the settlement of the strikes. He declared that three Bills – concerning the forty-hour working week, collective contracts, and holidays with pay – would be immediately tabled by the government, and he asked the Chamber to discuss them by an extra-rapid procedure.

That was the first effect the strikes had on Parliament. In May, even M. Jouhaux, the Secretary-General of the C.G.T., spoke of the forty-hour week in terms of international agreements to be reached at the I.L.O. at Geneva. The strikers were right – Parliament and the government needed 'pushing'.

The government obtained that day a majority of 174. In the course of the debate the Opposition had harped, above all, on the illegality of the stay-in strikes; and M. Xavier Vallat of the Croix de Feu, had attacked M. Blum personally by saying that

'for the first time in her history is this Gallo-Roman country of ours ruled by a Jew. . . . I have the friendliest feelings for my comrades, the Jewish ex-servicemen; and I do not deny the Jews the right to become assimilated in France; but I would prefer to see, at the head of the government, a man with deeper roots in the national soil.'

Blum went white with anger, and there was a terrible uproar.

The whole of the following day was taken up by negotiations at the Hotel Matignon, the Premier's office, between the representatives of the C.G.T. and the representatives of the

Confédération Générale de la Production Française. The meeting was presided over by M. Blum in person. The outcome of this interminable meeting was the famous 'Matignon Agreement'.

It should be said from the outset that the manner in which the agreement was negotiated had its weak points. On the one hand, the C.G.T. represented legally only a fairly small proportion of the workers (and, as we have seen, the strikes continued on a large scale even after the Matignon Agreement, not only among non-union labour but also among a great deal of the newly-recruited union labour); on the other hand, the Confédération Générale de la Production Française, though the largest employers' federation, with a national membership, nevertheless represented chiefly the larger industrial employers (and not even all of them – even such important concerns as the Paris Department Stores were outside the C.G.P.F.); and the smaller employers afterwards accused the C.G.P.F. of having betrayed them by signing the Matignon Agreement. Their argument was that the Comité des Forges and other large employers could well afford to grant to their workers all the concessions provided in the Matignon Agreement; and it was even suggested that, in signing it, the large employers were deliberately trying to ruin their smaller and weaker competitors.

Trotsky goes so far as to suggest that their purpose in signing the Matignon Agreement was to create a ruined middle class, the essential human material for a Fascist revolution. Plausible though the argument may sound, one may wonder whether an industrial magnate is really better off in Mussolini's Italy than in France – though he has, no doubt, a quieter life.

Lastly, the employers afterwards claimed that they had practically been bullied into the Matignon Agreement by M. Blum.

The principal provisions of the Matignon Agreement were:

> Collective labour contracts shall be immediately established.
>
> The employers shall recognise their employees' freedom of opinion and their right to belong to any legally constituted trade union.
>
> In the distribution of labour, and in the enlistment and

dismissal of their employees, the employers shall not take the employees' trade union membership or non-membership into consideration.

All real wages, as they stood on May 25, shall be increased from fifteen per cent in the case of the lowest wages to seven per cent in the case of the highest. In no case shall the wage-bill of any concern exceed twelve per cent.

In the negotiations for fixing the minimum wage by regions and categories abnormally low wages must be adjusted.

Every concern, employing more than ten workers may elect two or more workers' delegates, according to the importance of the concern. The delegates may present to the management individual claims concerning wages, measures of hygiene and safety, and the application of laws, decrees and the labour code.

All workers, male and female, over eighteen, and not less than three months with the firm, may vote.

Workers over twenty-five, of French nationality, and not less than one year with the firm, are eligible.

The employers' delegation undertakes not to take any reprisals against the strikers.

The C.G.T. Federation requests the strikers to resume work as soon as the management of their respective firms have accepted this general agreement, and as soon as conversations have been opened between them and the management concerning its application.

In four-inch characters the *Peuple*, the C.G.T. paper, announced on the following morning this 'VICTORY OVER POVERTY', adding: 'Eight million wage-earners have received satisfaction.' And M. Jouhaux, who had signed the agreement on behalf of the C.G.T., wrote:

> 'The working class has won the greatest victory in its history. For the first time in history has a convention been signed between the representatives of the C.G.T. and the C.G.P.F. That is the capital fact, which will have immense repercussions, and will open a new era in industrial relations. This is the beginning of a new economic era – an era of *direct relations* between Capital and Labour discussing their respective interests on a free and equal footing.'

What was the significance of all this? Many Englishmen, who thought that the position of the trades unions was, more or less the same in France as in England, found all this great enthusiasm over the Matignon Agreement rather puzzling. Had there been no collective bargaining in France before? they asked.

Let us look back for a minute. French trade unionism, which was syndicalist and revolutionary before the War, became Reformist during the War years – largely under the influence of M. Jouhaux himself, who had undergone a curious process of transformation as a result of the close collaboration between the State and the C.G.T. during the War. The pre-War syndicalists, who were revolutionary in temper, regarded collective bargaining as an intolerable restriction on the right to strike. But, in time, it came to be valued as 'an absolute negation of the principle of authority and domination';[1] and in 1920, M. Jouhaux himself, who had ceased to scorn orderly relations with employers, complained that the big employers refused to recognise collective bargaining.

In 1919, the year of the eight-hour law, the C.G.T. was a powerful organisation, with a membership of two million – an increase of about forty per cent over 1913. It was also in 1919 that a law was passed legalising collective trade agreements – the famous *contrats collectifs*. The *contrat collectif* was defined in the law as 'a contract in respect of conditions of work, which is entered into between representatives of a trade union and any organisation of workers on the one hand, and representatives of an employers' association, or any other group of employers or even one employer on the other hand. . . . To be valid the contract must be registered with the proper legal authorities.'

These agreements were not compulsory; but, even so, no fewer than 557 were entered into in 1919; during the War the C.G.T., through its co-operation with the government, had virtually become a semi-official body – though M. Jouhaux complained in 1920, as already said, of the big employers negative attitude to the *contrats collectifs*.

It was in 1920 and 1921 that the C.G.T. suffered two terrible blows. One was the failure of the general and railway strikes of 1920 – a failure which was followed by ruthless reprisals by the government and the employers – 25,000 out of the 200,000 railwaymen were dismissed outright, several trade union leaders were arrested and the larger employers made it a rule to boycott union labour. Trade union membership dropped

[1] See the excellent and detailed *Labour Movement in post-War France* by D. J. Saposs, Columbia University Press, New York, 1931.

at a catastrophic rate. The second blow to French trade unionism was the split in the C.G.T. in 1921, when the more extreme elements broke away and formed the C.G.T.U. This split followed closely upon the 1920 split in the Socialist Party, when the French Communist Party was formed. The more extreme syndicalist elements went over to the C.G.T.U., and although this new organisation had a psychological atmosphere that was akin to the revolutionary syndicalism of pre-War years – and it was this syndicalist spirit which frequently manifested itself in the great June strikes – the C.G.T.U. nevertheless came under the close control of the Communist Party and the Profintern, the Red Trade Union International. It was not until the formation of the Front Commun in 1934 that a parallel tendency towards amalgamation manifested itself in the C.G.T. and the C.G.T.U.; and this amalgamation was formally agreed upon in January 1936. Since then there has been a struggle for supremacy in the new C.G.T. between the extremists (and M. Jouhaux had by this time regained some of his pre-War extremism) and the moderates – with M. Belin as their principal spokesman.

French trade unionism was terribly weakened for several years to come by the failure of the 1920 strike and by the split in the C.G.T. in 1921. Thus, in 1919, the metal industry had 234,000 trade union members, and only 45,000 early in 1936. In the textile industry the drop was from 174,000 to 40,000. In both these industries the big employers were powerfully organised, and studiously autocratic in their attitude to labour. (The attitude of the workers to a magnate like M. Renault, whom they regarded almost as a personal enemy, is typical of the relationship that existed for years between capital and labour in the big French engineering industry. This relationship was no better in the textile trade.) In the building trade the trade union membership also dropped from 135,000 in 1919 to 30,000 in 1936; in this industry the *terrassiers* (navvies) alone, affiliated with the C.G.T.U., were well organised, and had the reputation of being very revolutionary. They included many Italians.

By 1921 trade union membership had dropped from two millions to 600,000, and even at the beginning of 1936, when the two federations amalgamated, they had little more than

1,300,000 members between them – with roughly 900,000 in the C.G.T., and 450,000 in the C.G.T.U.

But the most extraordinary feature of French trade unionism was the high proportion of members not employed in private industry. Thus, in the C.G.T. in 1927, sixty per cent of the members were state employees, or the employees of public or semi-public services – 180,000 government officials, 58,000 postmen, 76,000 teachers, 48,000 municipal employees, 75,000 railwaymen and others – a total of 550,000 out of a total of 900,000. The government officials' right to strike was a moot point; – there had been several postmen's strikes, and the government employees had also taken part in the one-day general strike of February 12, 1934 – and MM. Doumergue and Tardieu, as we have seen, wished to make it perfectly clear – through a constitutional law – that they had no such right to strike.

In the C.G.T.U. the 'private' trades were more adequately represented than in the C.G.T., but there also the public and semi-public services accounted for thirty-five per cent of the total membership of 450,000.

It is remarkable how a large proportion of these union members refrained from striking in June 1936 – a fact which prompted M. Jouhaux, at the beginning of the strikes, to point out to the employers that 'it paid to employ union labour', which he said stood for orderly relations with the employers.

Collective bargaining, which had received official recognition by the law of May 25, 1919 – but which was not made compulsory – declined together with the decline of the C.G.T. The number of registered collective contracts dropped from 557 (the record) in 1919 to 126 in 1925; and the big employers, becoming more autocratic than ever with the growth of unemployment since 1932 refused to be tied by any trade agreements. Conditions of employment became very arbitrary, but unco-ordinated local strikes were of little use during the years of economic depression.

The great strike movement of June 1936 broke out in circumstances more favourable than any that had existed for years. The Matignon Agreement was confirmed and completed by the Collective Contracts Act of June 24 providing

for the procedure by which collective contracts were to be drawn up, and the points which they must cover: trade union freedom, freedom of opinion, workers' delegates, minimum wage, conditions of dismissal, organisation of apprenticeship, procedure to be adopted in cases of dispute, etc. It laid down much firmer rules for the contents of the contracts than the law of May 1919.

The procedure for drawing up the Contract provided by the Law was as follows: A mixed Commission of employers and workers is to be set up by the Minister of Labour at the request of a trade union, workers' or employers' organisation with a view to concluding a collective contract regulating the relations between the employers and workers. The work of the Commission is to be supervised by the Minister of Labour in person (in the case of a national agreement) or by his representatives (prefect, etc.) in the case of an agreement of smaller scope. The government's role in making and maintaining the collective contracts is not (as was widely supposed at the time), one of arbitration, but one of mediation;[1] though the law gave the government the right to impose the collective contract agreed to by the majority of the employers and labour organisations of a given trade and/or region upon the dissenting minority, or, at any rate, to make them model their individual contracts after the contract adopted by the majority. In this manner uniformity is achieved in conditions of labour in a given industry and region, and competition is eliminated among employers towards paying the lowest possible wages.

In the opinion of many observers, these provisions point to a tendency, on the part of the French Government, towards the corporatist method of Fascist Italy, with 'collective contracts becoming the shell or framework of the trade or corporation'.[2]

The resemblance with Italy is, of course, only a superficial one; for in Italy only the Fascist Trade Unions can speak on behalf of the workers, while in France all workers' organisations have equal legal status; and, as distinct from Italy, the

[1] It was not until December, after the employers had broken off the negotiations that had been going on for weeks between them and the C.G.T. with a view to setting up a compulsory arbitration procedure, that the government decided to enforce such compulsory arbitration by law. The Bill was passed by Parliament on December 29, and was applied successfully to a number of disputes in January 1937. It promises to reduce greatly the number of strikes.

[2] *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, September 1936, p. 398.

strike and lockout continue to be legally recognised in France. Nevertheless, certain critics of the law have complained that the clause whereby 'the most representative labour and trade union organisations' are to be represented on the mixed committees drawing up the collective contracts, has tended to encourage the C.G.T. to claim an exclusive right to be represented on every committee, to the detriment of smaller unions, such as the (admittedly unimportant) Christian Workers' Union, and the minor unions set up latterly, with the encouragement of the employers, by Croix de Feu and other Fascist elements. The method of electing workers' delegates has also given rise to some confusion, and was one of the principal causes of the great textile strike at Lille in September.

It is true, nevertheless, that in most of the collective contracts signed, everything is worked out in great detail,[1] and 'misunderstandings' in subsequent disputes were often deliberate – especially on the part of certain employers with autocratic habits, who had been 'rushed' into signing the contracts in June, or on the part of the more revolutionary element among the workers.

The collective contracts had the effect of giving the workers greater stability and security ('he knew where he stood'); though in certain branches of the building trades, where a worker could be dismissed at one hour's notice before, the time was increased, under the collective contract, to only five hours. In certain trades flourishing on sweated labour, such as the Paris Department Stores – where the stay-in strike continued for three weeks – some of the wages were increased in actual practice, by fifty and seventy-five per cent, under the arbitration (accepted by both sides) of M. Salengro, the Minister of the Interior. Many employers, who felt that these agreements had been 'forced' upon them, declined to sign them for more than a year.

As a result of the strikes and the Matignon Agreement the

[1] For instance, the collective contract signed by the electricians of the Paris region comprises seven printed pages with eighteen articles concerning wages per categories, hours of work, overtime, travelling expenses, dangerous and unhealthy work, tools, apprentices, time of pay, holidays, enlistment and dismissal, hygiene, security, workers delegates, etc.– while bank clerks have a collective contract of nineteen printed pages with fifty-four articles.

membership of the C.G.T. rose from 1,300,000 in May to nearly 5,000,000 in September.

Another equally popular law voted by Parliament on June 20 introduced compulsory holidays with pay – fifteen days for all who had been employed with their firm for not less than a year and shorter holidays for others.

In the summer of 1936 this law proved a godsend to holiday resorts. M. Lagrange, the Under-Secretary for the organisation of Sports and Leisure who had got the railways to issue no fewer than 500,000 'Lagrange' tickets to wage-earners, claimed that this law had created almost a 'social' revolution:

> 'You cannot imagine what a difference it has made. In the past only highly-qualified workers could afford to take a fortnight's holiday; the others scarcely ever got away at all, for any "day off" meant losing money. In June I reached an agreement with the railway companies, and any wage-earner was entitled to a forty per cent reduction on his holiday ticket if he travelled on an ordinary train, and to a sixty per cent reduction, if he travelled by a special "Lagrange" train. We have issued up to now no fewer than 500,000 such tickets.
>
> 'It has had an extraordinary psychological effect on our people. I have had thousands of letters from every kind of worker and employee telling me how delighted they were. These people feel that they have risen, as it were, to a higher social level. They have seen for the first time things they had only seen in picture papers and the cinema. Just think of it! Of the tens of thousands who went down to the Riviera over ninety per cent had never seen the Riviera and sixty per cent had never seen the sea! Our seaside resorts and mountain resorts were crowded this summer with people, many of whom had never before taken a holiday. Such things naturally widen the outlook of people who have never seen anything except their factory or their office. It also gives the working class a sense of greater economic stability – it points, as it were, to a "fonctionnarisation" of the working class: it makes them feel that they are beginning to gain some of the privileges hitherto reserved for government officials.
>
> 'Needless to say, the hotel-keepers have done better this summer than for years – even though I got their syndicates and the tourist agencies to agree to the lowest possible terms. For 380 francs (£3 10s.), railway and everything included, a Paris worker or office clerk could spend a week on the Riviera, and for 500 francs (£4 15s.) a fortnight. I also managed to organise for 850 francs (£8) a fortnight's trip to Algeria. This included the journey, the keep, and several motor trips in

Algeria. You can imagine the thrill of a Paris workman at being in Algeria! Algeria is the most beautiful country in the world. They were shown a good part of the country, Roman ruins and what not. The local authorities gave them splendid official receptions. I hope to extend these cheap trips to Tunisia and Morocco.

'At the moment I am organising on the same basis cheap trips to the winter sports. There is a certain "snobbish" delight in doing what only the rich have been able to do so far. Lots of young workers, students, etc., have already applied for four- or five-day tickets for winter sports. I am also trying to get the Paris department stores to sell standardised cheap winter sports outfits.

'We want to make our youth healthy and happy,' M. Lagrange said. 'Hitler has been very clever at that sort of thing, and there is no reason why a democratic government should not do the same.'[1]

With the Bills for collective contracts and holidays with pay, it was comparatively plain sailing. With the Bill introducing the forty-hour week the government was on more dangerous ground. The Bill met with furious opposition in the Senate; – but the Senate voted it none the less – again under the pressure of the strikes.

A Communist deputy remarked to me about that time: 'Of course the Senators are going to vote it; they are haunted by the vision of a Front Populaire demonstration of 500,000 people trampling down the flower-beds in the Luxembourg garden' [outside the Senate]. He was right; they voted it – though not without many murmurs about 'outside pressure'; and they continued to bear the Blum Government a grudge.

The forty-hour Act has the characteristics of several other Acts voted under the Blum Government: it lays down the general principle, that the forty-hour week shall apply to all French trades and occupations, but leaves the application of this principle and the elaboration of the details to the government.

This law was, naturally, severely criticised as being, in the absence of an international agreement, economically unsound; some even said 'suicidal'. The government was not in a hurry to apply this law; its first application – to coal-mining – was, indeed, decided upon on September 25 – the very day

[1] Interview with M. Lagrange, *Manchester Guardian*, October 19, 1936.

the government also decided to devalue the franc.[1] It was not a simple coincidence; for by passing the labour reforms (which were bound to increase very considerably costs of production) before devaluing the franc, the Blum Government had, in the opinion of even its friendly critics, put the cart before the horse. The overvalued currency, they said, had handicapped France for years; by increasing costs on top of this handicap, the government was placing France in an altogether impossible position.

But M. Blum, and especially M. Vincent Auriol, the Minister of Finance, persisted for a time against the better judgment of most of their Cabinet colleagues, in 'defending the franc'.

[1] Before the end of the year the forty-hour week was extended to certain other mines, to the textile and engineering trades, and to bakeries in certain parts of the country.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FRENCH 'NEW DEAL'

THE labour reforms of June 1936, combined with the financial policy of the Blum Government have gone – especially in the British and American Press – by the name of France's 'New Deal'.

During the four–and especially two–previous years France had pursued a policy of deflation; – cuts in government wages and pensions, followed by cuts in industrial wages; reductions in social expenditure, and a general tightening of the belt. This orthodox financial policy, which was largely carried out 'for the sake of the franc' (old Doumergue, in his broadcast addresses, spoke of devaluation as though it were the end of the world), and at the instigation of the Bank of France, proved a failure.

M. Vincent Auriol, the new Finance Minister, while paying a tribute to the courage of those who had pursued this policy, said that its failure was not in doubt; and he decided to reverse the policy. That the policy of deflation was not a success was easy to show; the trade recovery that could be observed in most countries since 1934 was conspicuously absent in France; exports continued to drop from one low record to another; and the tourist trade, owing to the high cost of living, was dead. The continuous economy cuts (of which the most important were the Laval cuts of July 1935, amounting to some ten milliard francs) did not have the effect of balancing the Budget – far from it. Blum was right, in 1933, to call the Budget equilibrium an elusive phantom which would never be caught so long as the policy of deflation continued. The public debt of France increased between 1932 and 1936 by about eighty milliard francs – nearly a quarter of the total debt. The economic depression reflected in such things as colossal railway deficits, was mainly responsible for this increase. An important contributory cause was the increased expenditure on armaments.

Ever since 1934 M. Paul Reynaud had urged the government to devalue the franc, as this 'could not go on'. For a long time he was a voice calling in the wilderness; and while the devaluation theory had made much headway by 1935, there were still few who would openly identify themselves with M. Reynaud's views. It was not until after the General Election of 1936 that such inveterate 'defenders of the franc' as M. Germain Martin came forward in the financial Press with articles in favour of an 'alignment of currencies' – for the word 'devaluation' was still taboo.

We have seen how, before taking office, M. Blum stopped the flight from the franc by saying that the currency would be defended; and how, on the day of the Ministerial Declaration on June 6, he declared that there would be no 'monetary *coup d'état*'. Many members of the Blum Government were privately convinced that the government was wrong in committing itself to a defence of the franc. I remember one of them telling me, a few days before the formation of the government: 'If we devalue at once, we'll be able to carry on for four years; *sans ça, nous sommes foutus.*' The opinion was shared by several members of the government – Radicals and Socialists alike. But the Communists were, officially, hostile; they declared it to be robbery of the poor; and said instead that 'the rich must pay'. The C.G.T. leaders were less uncompromising: 'nobody,' the *Peuple* wrote in June, 'is in favour of a surgical operation; but if it has to be done let's have it right away rather than go on swallowing the medicine of deflation, which will kill us.'

But M. Vincent Auriol, the Finance Minister, would have neither deflation nor devaluation. What he said, in substance, in his speech before the Chamber on June 19, was this: the increase in wages, the increase in public expenditure will develop the purchasing-power of the people. As the rhythm of consumption increases, the revenue returns will improve, and a real Budget equilibrium will be obtained. Capital will return from abroad, and come out of the woollen stockings. (It was, indeed, estimated that something like thirty or forty milliard francs was being privately hoarded.) Could this purchasing-power theory work?

The Matignon Agreement had provided for an all-round

twelve per cent increase in wages; and with the paid holidays and the forty-hour week added, it was estimated by the critics of the government (P. Reynaud, M. Jacquier, Rapporteur of the Finance Committee, etc.) that both wholesale and retail prices would increase by thirty-five per cent. It is true that the forty-hour week had not yet come into practice; – and it was this forty-hour week which, from the point of view of costs, appeared to be the most serious matter. M. Jouhaux joyfully said that, with the forty-hour week, the Matignon increase, etc., *hourly* wages in France would be up by thirty-five per cent; while M. Mercier, the electricity magnate, put the figure even higher – forty to fifty per cent. He declared the forty-hour week to be 'a reckless plunge into the unknown'.

M. Blum, it is true, said in the Chamber on June 12, that there was 'no strict relationship between the rate of wages and the cost of living', since wages were not the most important element in the total costs. More important were the running expenses, financial burdens, and taxes. The wage increases, he suggested, would be absorbed in the increased turnover.

'Laval' cuts amounting to what M. Gardey estimated at one and a half milliard francs, were restored in the Budget – also on the 'purchasing-power' principle. To diminish unemployment and increase purchasing-power, a Bill was voted approving a four-year Public Works' Plan, with a total cost of eighteen milliard francs; – the C.G.T., the originator of the scheme, was particularly anxious to have it put into operation at once.

The Senate voted all the Bills; – but, it must be admitted, with very bad grace. 'Do it, if you, the chosen government of the people, think it right,' the Senators said in substance. 'We shall not interfere with you. But don't expect us to be enthusiastic. We believe your whole scheme to be utterly unsound.' And M. Caillaux, who, for years, had preached the unimaginative doctrine of penance to the French, dismissed the Blum–Auriol New Deal as 'Rooseveltism for Lilliputians'. What he meant was that the American New Deal had started with a forty per cent devaluation of the Dollar; that there was, in the United States, no problem of public credit, as there was in France. The relatively moderate federal debt

could be swelled in four years by 200 milliard francs with impunity, that is, without weakening the Treasury's borrowing capacity, and without increasing interest rates. The financial position in France was entirely different. Moreover, the United States was a vast continent with inexhaustible resources; which, if necessary could live without an export trade; – though, thanks to devaluation, even the exports had been able to continue. France, on the other hand, was up to her ears in debt; interest rates were high; and the increased costs of production would only aggravate her handicaps as an exporter – handicaps caused by the divergence between home and world prices. Such was the orthodox criticism of the French 'New Deal'.

In fact, M. Vincent Auriol, and the government as a whole were aware of their limited possibilities; and during what he called 'the period of transition and adaptation', M. Vincent Auriol went very cautiously about his job. The forty-hour week was not introduced right away; – the first decree introducing it (in coal-mining) was not to be signed until the day when devaluation was decided upon; the Public Works' programme was put in cold storage for a good long time; and he was also cautious not to draw heavily on the Bank of France; for he was opposed to large scale inflation. Or, if there was to be inflation, it might at least be done honestly and openly. He rightly observed that his predecessors had, for several months past, flourished on disguised inflation. He had found fourteen milliards of Government Bonds in the 'Commercial Portfolio' of the Bank of France, which had simply been put there in exchange for bank-notes. Instead of paying a high interest on these bonds, he decided to transform them into temporary 'advances to the State', at an interest rate of 0.2 per cent. This item in the statement of the Bank of France had disappeared since the stabilisation law of 1928, and, since it symbolised inflation, successive governments attempted, by various subterfuges, to prevent this item from reappearing again in the weekly Bank statements. M. Vincent Auriol preferred to call a spade a spade.

In addition, he signed a convention with the Bank allowing the government to draw on the Bank, in cases of emergency, to the extent of another ten milliard francs; but since M. Vin-

cent Auriol considered such inflation unhealthy, he promised to repay any such temporary advances by borrowing from the general public. This desire to check inflation was at the origin of the famous Auriol 'Baby Bonds' which were launched on July 17. The smallest unit of these bonds was 200 francs, and the loan was calculated to appeal to a very wide public, and be at the same time a demonstration of not only political, but also financial confidence in the Front Populaire Government. The appeal for funds was accompanied by assurances that the franc would not be devalued. In three months four milliard francs were raised by this loan. Financially, it was not a great success. The Banks were reluctant to subscribe to it; but, morally, it was a success, for many thousands of people, in sympathy with the government (in appealing for funds M. Blum had said that the success of the Front Populaire programme depended on this loan) had subscribed to it. Subscriptions were spontaneously organised in the factories; and I know many ordinary workmen who put all their savings into the loan – a few hundred or two or three thousand francs. It was a touching tribute to the Blum Government. And M. Vincent Auriol felt very uneasy about these little bondholders when devaluation had become inevitable, and promised them a bonus on their capital.

It was inevitable that during the period of 'transition and adaptation' that followed the Matignon Agreement, small manufacturers should be in a particularly difficult position; and M. Vincent Auriol placed at their disposal a fund of three and a half milliard francs from which they could borrow a limited amount of money for nine months at a low interest rate. But the whole mechanism was unwieldy and, at the end of three months, only about 200,000,000 francs were borrowed from the fund.

Without exactly flourishing as a result of the 'increased purchasing-power' – the holidays with pay alone provided a certain fillip to the tourist trade – France plodded, without much trouble, through the summer of 1936. The assurances that there would be no 'monetary *coup d'état*', and M. Vincent Auriol's cautious management, even tended for a time to improve the bourse quotations of government loans, and the repatriation of capital that the government attempted to force

upon investors, as well as the restrictions the banks had placed, at the government's request, on foreign exchange transactions, resulted, for a time, in a net increase in the gold reserve. In June and in the middle of September this stood at roughly the same figure – about fifty-four milliard francs. Unfortunately the exports had fallen, for various reasons (strikes, higher costs, etc.) to new low levels; the Spanish Civil War created a new atmosphere of nervousness, and the new German *coup* of August 31, doubling the term of military service, obliged the French Government to adopt a vast new programme of additional military expenditure – sixteen milliards in the next four years. Where was the money to come from?

All this combined to shake confidence in the franc once more. In spite of restrictions, gold began to run out again, and by September 23, the gold reserve had sunk below fifty milliard francs (allowing for the three milliards owing to England) – the 'war chest' minimum fixed by the French General Staff.

At the Ministerial Council on Friday, September 25, devaluation was decided upon. That night, M. Vincent Auriol was in telephonic communication with London and Washington until the final text of the Three-Power Declaration in favour of monetary co-operation and the maintenance of world prices was agreed upon. When at 1 a.m. he finally received the Press, he looked completely exhausted. He even forgot to say that the Bank of France had decided to stop gold exports from the following day.

The devaluation of the franc was received with considerable resignation by the general public; anyone who believed that it would cause riot and revolution had misjudged the state of public opinion. What most people said (not without a touch of scepticism) was: 'Well, let's see if things improve a bit at last.' The government, naturally, did not call it devaluation; it preferred to call it an 'alignment of currencies' (though the Three-Power Declaration was not legally binding); and on the following day, in receiving the Press at the Hotel Matignon, M. Blum made a great display of enthusiasm over the Three-Power Declaration. He spoke of the co-operation of the three great democracies, and paid warm personal tributes to Mr. Neville Chamberlain and Mr. Morgenthau.

'I think it is for the first time in history,' he said, 'that three Great Powers have informed world opinion by a public document of their will to make a joint effort for the restoration of normal monetary and economic relations and to arrive at that material pacification which is a condition and a forerunner of political pacification.... I believe this to be a political event of the first importance.... It is not true, as some papers have suggested, that this document was simply a little trick for camouflaging the real meaning of the financial operation.... The latter is not a sudden expedient or a measure imposed on us by this or that special consideration, though naturally the operation was not unconnected with certain events....

'In spite of the great difficulties, which we shall do our best to overcome, I think we have a right to consider our decision as one of the elements which will tend above all to facilitate international agreements and peace among nations.'

He also emphasised the 'social counterpart' of the 'financial operation'; – a social counterpart which, during the following week, was to be torn to shreds by the Senate.

The *Temps*, commenting on Blum's statement, said that the whole thing had 'nothing to do with peace', and that the Three-Power Declaration was largely a put-up show, of small practical value. Actually, the Declaration was of some importance, both practical and moral. It eliminated the danger of a currency war, and of tariff reprisals against devaluation; and the lead taken by the three Democracies against autarchy had its moral significance. The Blum Government claimed that negotiations for such a Declaration had been in progress since June (which prompted many of its critics to say that it had launched its last loan on false pretences); but it seems that, in actual practice, the negotiations were rather tentative; and it is certain that it was not until late on Friday night September 25 that the final text of the Declaration was agreed upon.

The Communists were dissatisfied – or at least said that they were dissatisfied – with the devaluation; but the *Peuple*, the paper of the C.G.T., treated it in a fair spirit, and with undisguised approval:

'At last the mortgage has been raised,' M. Belin wrote. 'Here at last is the surgical operation that our exhausted economic system has been waiting for so long. The operation has been carried out in a cool and level-headed way, without fuss or panic, and in agreement with Great Britain and the United States. It is, practically speaking, an alignment of currencies,

accompanied by a large measure of stability. The constant threat to the franc and the everlasting increases in the bank-rate which did so much to upset our economic conditions are at last at an end.' *Le Peuple*, September 27.

M. Belin was right, the operation had been carried out in a cool and level-headed manner. Unfortunately, it had come rather late. The government derived almost no financial benefit from the revaluation of the gold in the Bank of France. With the gold at only fifty milliards, the revaluation produced only fifteen milliards, of which ten milliards had to be set aside for the new Exchange Equalisation Fund.

A member of the Blum Government told me a few days later: 'It didn't hurt, did it? If only it had been done sooner! say in May 1935, when there were still seventy milliards of gold in the Bank. Still, better late than never.'

The four-day devaluation debate at the Chamber and Senate, which were reassembled for the occasion, was stormy and disagreeable. The devaluation itself was accepted as an accomplished fact; but the Senate rebelled against the 'social counterpart' proposed by the government: a sliding scale for wages, and increases in wages, pensions, etc., to offset the evil effects of devaluation. The Senate claimed that the government's proposals would completely destroy any good that would come from devaluation, and accused it of 'assuming too readily, and so legitimising in advance, any increase in prices and the cost of living'.

The final outcome of these deliberations, in the course of which the Senate threatened to overthrow the government, was as follows: the devaluation proper was approved, an exchange stabilisation fund of ten milliard francs was set up; all transactions in gold were made subject to the permission of the Bank of France; all gold – with a few minor exceptions – was to be exchanged for notes at the Bank of France within one month at the old rate, or else declared, and the difference paid in the form of a tax.[1] All cash and forward exchange transac-

[1] This was a highly 'moral' measure, but not an effective one, and it tended to retard the return of capital into circulation, and even to encourage the illicit export of gold to Switzerland, where the devaluation had not been accompanied by any such anti-profiteering measures. On December 16 M. Vincent Auriol recognised the error when he announced the new French loan with a forty per cent bonus – a loan to be subscribed with hoarded gold. The purpose of the loan was to bring the hoarded gold back to the Bank of France. An offer on similar lines was made to holders of 'Auriol bonds'.

tions between September 1 and 26, were to be declared within fifteen days. A 50 per cent tax was also payable on the net proceeds of all forward transactions carried out on French Bourses between September 21 and 26 in all securities other than French Government securities.

As regards the 'social counterpart', the government gave way to the Senate nearly all along the line. All that the Senate agreed to was to restore certain earlier cuts in War pensions, and to give some compensation to small bondholders, and particularly to the holders of 'Auriol Bonds'. But the government servants received no compensation (at any rate, the bill providing for such compensation was held up by the Senate for 'future examination'); and, instead of the sliding scale for wages, M. Blum could only get the Senate to agree to a procedure of government arbitration in labour disputes to be caused by a notable rise in the cost of living, – but even this procedure was limited to three months.[1]

The bad humour of the Senate on that, as well as on earlier and later occasions, was largely due to the stay-in strikes, which continued throughout the year, though, since August, on only a small scale. Ever since June, the Senate had treated the Blum Government with great distrust, and had accused it of 'condoning illegality' – of which the stay-in strikes were the most glaring example. One day in June, at the instigation of M. Caillaux, the Senate got M. Salengro into a tight corner, and M. Bienvenu-Martin, the ninety-year-old 'father of the house', asked M. Salengro whether, yes or no, the government would tolerate any more stay-in strikes. M. Salengro, not being a great parliamentary debater, and feeling the government to be in danger, could think of nothing better than to utter a categorical 'no'. Such strikes, he said, would be prevented 'by every appropriate means'.

Afterwards, he (and other members of the government) tried to explain this away by saying that this did not mean that the police would chase out the workers as soon as a stay-in strike had broken out. Force would be used, but only as a very last resort, after every effort at a peaceful settlement had failed. And, on another, much later occasion, M. Blum said

[1] The subsequent compulsory arbitration bill is referred to at the end of the foregoing chapter.

that the government believed in dealing with stay-in strikes 'firmly but not brutally'; for it would be deplorable if the working class, so loyal to the Republic, were to turn against it.

In October, to please the Senate, the government actually used the police against stay-in strikers. When, on October 3, a stay-in strike broke out in a number of Paris hotels and restaurants (it was a particularly unpopular strike; devaluation had just been passed, and many foreigners had come to Paris to take advantage of it, and the motor show had just opened) the staff were, in several cases, 'invited' by the police to clear the premises. A few days later a chocolate factory in Paris was evacuated by the police; this was a more difficult operation; and in the process a number of strikers and policemen were injured.

Government supporters readily accused the Senate of excessive crudeness in its attitude to the stay-in strikes. While the conflict between the Senate and the government was at its height on October 1, government supporters could be heard saying in the Chamber lobbies that, although the Senate had rendered the Republic many services in the past, particularly in helping in the overthrow of Tardieu and Doumergue, it was this time showing a deplorably conservative spirit, and was identifying too closely the notion of 'bourgeois Republic' with that of 'Republic'. A leading Left-Wing Radical went even further, and said it was high time that the Senate 'that remnant of an essentially monarchist Constitution' be reduced to the role of the House of Lords.

This conflict between the Senate and the Left majority of the Chamber was to continue.[1]

[1] At the very end of 1936 M. Vincent Auriol proclaimed a return to a complete freedom in financial matters, including the export of capital. He wished to restore complete confidence in the franc in this manner. This 'liberalism' was in curious contrast with the 'planned economy' ideas so prominent earlier in the year, especially before the Three-Power Declaration, and the advocates of planned economy – in the C.G.T. and elsewhere – were disappointed.

CHAPTER XX

'200 FAMILIES' AND 'MERCHANTS OF DEATH'

(WITH SOME UNAVOIDABLE TECHNICALITIES)

THE Front Populaire programme as well as the French New Deal provide for three other measures of primary importance: the Office du Blé; the reform of the Bank of France, and the Nationalisation of the Manufacture and Sale of Armaments.

I shall deal only briefly with the Office du Blé. It had held, for long, an important place in the programme of the Socialist party. The purpose of this reform was to take the trade in wheat out of private hands, to abolish speculation, and to achieve stability in wheat prices. For the worst enemies of the peasant, as has often been observed, are instability and uncertainty. It is the Office du Blé, attached to the Ministry of Agriculture, which, after receiving information from every part of France on the quantity of wheat sown, fixes in the second half of June, the amount to be put on the market by each grower, and which fixes, in the second half of August, the price of wheat for the year.

The Committee administering the Board is composed of farmers, consumers, millers, bakers and other interests concerned.

In the original Bill the co-operative societies were to be the exclusive agents to whom the wheat was to be sold by the growers, and the government's principal object was to keep out the grain merchant – for, as past experience had shown, government-fixed prices were disregarded by the grain trade. Thus, in 1934, when the legal minimum price was fixed at 115 francs per quintal, the peasants, short of ready cash, sold the wheat to profiteers for 70 or 80 francs. The Senate nevertheless rebelled against the proposed total socialisation of wheat marketing, and insisted that traders should be allowed

to buy and market wheat on the same basis as the co-operatives. The government finally accepted this amendment – though M. Monnet, the Minister of Agriculture, nearly resigned as a result. However, the law contains a number of provisions regarding the control of payments to the growers; so that the old abuses of 1934 have been rendered particularly difficult.

The French peasantry suffered severe hardships during 1934–5 as a result of the wheat slump, which brought down prices to 55 or 60 francs a quintal – a figure far below the cost of production. While opposed for a long time to the 'inquisition' that the Wheat Board inevitably involves, they were ready after their lean years, to accept a system which, despite certain disadvantages, guaranteed them not only a stable price, but also a *remunerative* price.

Critics of the government have not failed to observe that since many Socialists are more interested in cheap bread than in dear wheat, the tendency of the government, throughout the interminable Office du Blé debate in July and August 1936, was to stress the stability of wheat prices, rather than their 'revalorisation' (that is, high prices); and since the formation of the Office du Blé which fixed the price at 140 francs per quintal, there has been no shortage of criticisms to the effect that, in view of the poor harvest of 1936, and the absence of old stocks (a part of which was simply destroyed under M. Flandin's management), the price in the open market would be not 140 francs, but 160 francs, and that, in short, the Office du Blé was a means of cheating the farmers.

But the farmers, though grumbling as usual, were not really unhappy to get 140 francs, after the great slump of the two previous years. I recently heard of a farmer in Alsace, who, after grumbling a great deal against the Office du Blé, wound up his lamentations by asking hopefully if the government would not set up an Office du Houblon – a Hop Board – too? The Office du Blé is only in its first year; but it has, so far, worked fairly satisfactorily, (except for the delay with which farmers are sometimes paid for their crops).

It is true that the price of bread in the towns – 2 francs 20 a kilogramme (2 lb.) in November 1936 – went up by about

70 centimes in a few months – which caused much dissatisfaction among the town workers; but that was not the fault of the Office, but of the weather. The great virtue of the Office has been to increase the purchasing-power of the peasants (for, whatever the crop, it guarantees them a 'remunerative price'); to abolish speculation; and to tend to keep prices within certain limits – not abnormally high for the consumer, and not abnormally low for the producer.

Even the Communists admit that, in spite of the Senate's amendments, 'the Office du Blé should be able to work satisfactorily'. (*Almanach Ouvrier et Paysan*, 1937, p. 141.)

. . . . . .

A more popular subject than the Office du Blé is the Bank of France. In the General Election there was no more popular war-cry on the Left than 'Down with the 200 families'. The Bank of France, we were told, was the Bastille that still remained to be captured. For months before the election, several papers like *La Lumière*, Bergery's *Flèche*, and others, spent ninety per cent of their polemical vigour in denouncing the Regents of the Bank of France, and the '200 families' – the 200 largest shareholders of the Bank with voting powers, who came to be identified in the popular mind with the financial oligarchy. M. Francis Delaisi has written whole books about the crimes of the Bank of France. It supported the 'defeatist' Thiers against Gambetta when the latter intended to build up a new army in the course of the disastrous Franco-Prussian War; earlier still, in 1848, it refused credit facilities to the Republican Government, but granted them to General Cavaignac, after the massacres of June. Always it supported the Conservatives against the non-Conservatives, even when the latter (like Gambetta) had a higher sense of patriotism than the Conservatives. In 1925–6 the Bank of France sabotaged the Radical Governments; in 1934–5, when Flandin tried to introduce a more generous credit policy (and so, if possible, to avoid further deflation) the Bank of France torpedoed him.

Without dwelling on the spectacular denunciations of the '200 families', I shall summarise the grievances against the Bank of France by quoting the sober report of the Finance Committee of the Chamber, published on July 16, 1936, when

the Bank of France Reorganisation Bill first came up for discussion. What were the anomalies of the Bank of France before its transformation?

The Regency Council of the Bank consisted of the Governor, the two Assistant Governors, three auditors (*censeurs*) and fifteen Regents. The Governor and Assistant-Governors were appointed by the government, but the Regents and Auditors were chosen by the 200 largest shareholders, in virtue of the Statutes of the Bank drawn up under Napoleon I – at a time when these 200 shareholders were effectively among the most representative persons in the economic life of the country. Now, the Governor, though appointed by the Government, was apt – as past experience had shown – to come under the influence of the Regents. The Governor must hold no fewer than 100 shares – which, a few years ago represented the large capital of nearly two million francs – and the Regents usually helped the newly-appointed Governor by providing him, in one way or another, with his 100 shares. Moreover, it was within the power of the Regents to promise the Governor dazzling posts on the boards on the biggest companies, after his duties at the Bank of France were at an end. Several ex-Governors of the Bank of France still hold such posts. In short, more often than not, the Regents had the Governor in their pocket.

'The Regency Council,' says the Chamber report, 'is usually faithfully supported by the Governor, and it has always been the champion of the most rigid financial orthodoxy. No doubt, the Bank has rendered the State many great services in the past – particularly during the War when it placed vast amounts of government bonds in the country . . . but the fact remains that the Bank is in the hands of an oligarchy, which has succeeded in ruling the country over the heads of its chosen representatives.

'Being under the control of the representatives of this oligarchy the discount policy of the Bank of France is dictated only too often by considerations of a personal character. Credit facilities are granted more easily to those belonging to the oligarchy or connected with it, than to others outside it. The Regents of the Bank are naturally on the Board of Directors of a very large proportion of the bigger firms, such as

insurance, banking, engineering (Comité des Forges, etc.), shipping, electricity, railways, etc., and it is these big concerns which have all the credit facilities that are denied to the smaller firms.'

'On the other hand,' the report continues, 'this policy has, in certain cases encouraged over-production; in other cases it has stamped out many useful minor concerns, such as many private agricultural banks, whom the big joint-stock banks regarded as impertinent competitors, yet in reality much more deserving concerns than certain firms involved in the Oustric Scandal, over which the Bank of France burned its fingers.'

The most recent example of pressure exercised by the Bank on the government is the case of M. Flandin. A semi-official *communiqué* published by the Bank of France early in 1935 is an astounding example of the patronising airs assumed by the Regents of the Bank in relation to a government of the Republic, which was trying to induce them to adopt a more flexible discount policy:

> 'The Bank will discount Government Bills, but only within certain limits. It does not wish to find itself in the position of having to wonder what the signature of the State is worth. It will remain master of its own discount policy. . . . M. Flandin's Government has some praiseworthy actions to its credit. The Budget was voted in good time. By opposing the abolition of the economy decrees, it has shown a sound instinct. Its economic measures – though a little less certain – nevertheless deserve a good mark (!) in view of the difficulties of the situation. This good mark has been given to M. Flandin in the form of credit facilities. These credit facilities may not prove sufficient. He will ask for more credit. Our reply will then depend on whether we are satisfied with the actions of the government during the first respite we have given it as a reward for its present determination to defend the currency.' [1]

The style of this *communiqué* is even more revealing than the facts themselves: respite, good marks and so on.

The *Flèche,* commenting on this passage wrote: 'The Regents, like Bossuet's God, are able to raise or cast down the great – that is, Cabinet Ministers – in accordance with their willingness or reluctance to bow to them. . . . The people of France must choose between the Regents and Liberty.'

[1] Quoted by *La Flèche,* February 1, 1936.

In the end Flandin had to give way to the Bank and propose to the Chamber a return to deflation. The Chamber report already quoted says in this connection that, by deliberately failing to raise the bank-rate during the financial panic of May 1935, the Bank of France forced Flandin's hand.

In the General Election speakers of the Left frequently said that the *Banque de France* must be transformed into the *Banque de la France*, that is, France's Bank. In June, the Blum Government proposed, at first, to ask Parliament for plenary powers for reorganising the Bank of France; but the Senate would not hear of it. Later, the government drew up a Bill which, in a number of details, went further than the Bill finally voted by both Houses; nevertheless, the essential provisions remained intact. What is the new system?

First of all, the '200 families' – that is the 200 largest shareholders – have been 'democratised' down to the level of the 40,000 other shareholders, and each shareholder, regardless of his holdings, has now only one vote. The powers of the shareholders have been diminished. They elect the three Auditors (*censeurs*) – (who, it is true, are not powerless; for they can, if they are unanimous, veto the issue of bank-notes; though, apart from that, they cannot vote on the Regency Council) – and also two of the Councillors. The General Council, taking the place of the old Regency Council – and here we are at the heart of the reform – now consists of twenty-three members with voting powers: the Governor, the two Assistant-Governors and the twenty Councillors. Of these twenty Councillors, seven represent the Finance Ministry and various other financial government offices and organisations. Two represent the ministries of National Economy and Colonies. Of the remaining eleven Councillors, six are chosen by the Minister of Finance from lists submitted to him by the Artisans' Federation, the Co-operative Societies, the Chambers of Commerce, the C.G.T. (the trade unions), and representative bodies in trade and agriculture. One member is elected by the Staff of the Bank, one appointed by the National Economic Council and the remaining two, as already said, by the shareholders. The Governor is made independent of outside influence. He is no longer required to be a shareholder; and is paid a full salary for three years after leaving the Bank.

During this period he cannot enter any private employment. (In the original Bill he was to receive a life pension and never work again.)

Thus, both the General Council and the Governor have come under the effective control of the State. 'Apart from the share capital,' says M. Jenny, an expert of very orthodox financial views, 'the Bank of France has to all intents and purposes been nationalised.'[1] He goes on to argue that the real grievance against the old Bank of France was its determination to defend the franc. 'Now the Bank of France will act no longer as a brake, but as an engine. . . . The phrase "France's Bank" means either nothing, or else it means that its role as the great dispenser of credit – an important, but by no means the principal role of a central bank – will overshadow its essential role, which is to be the guardian of the currency.' Such is the opinion of a conservative critic of the new system. This new system has worked well enough, and without the extravagance that was anticipated by critics like M. Jenny. Without necessarily assuming that the Regents were guilty of all the crimes that have been attributed to them, the 'capture of the financial Bastille' has certainly removed a glaring anomaly from French public life, and has improved the chances of the New Deal. With the Wendels and Rothschilds controlling public credit no such experiment would have been conceivable.

. . . . . .

Second only in unpopularity to the '200 families' were the *marchands de canons*, the 'Merchants of Death'.

To take the manufacture of armaments out of private hands had been, for years, the aim and ambition of the French Parties of the Left. At Geneva, one French Government after another urged an international convention for stopping the private manufacture of and trade in armaments; and, in France, the question had become one of public morality. It was a question on which French opinion (as the election campaign showed) felt very strongly. Much as the French people would have preferred an international agreement to precede a purely 'national solution', they decided, in the absence of greater keenness elsewhere, to lead the way. Again France had

[1] *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, August 1936, p. 230-1.

put herself at the head of human progress. In the Chamber on July 17, M. Daladier, the War Minister, said: 'All nations are unanimous in their objections to war becoming a source of private profit. By putting an end to the scandal in its own country, the French Government wishes to set a loyal example which, it sincerely hopes, will be followed.'

And M. Chouffet, the Rapporteur of the Nationalisation of Armaments Bill, said that this nationalisation would benefit national defence by putting an end to the most scandalous form of profiteering, and so reduce the price to be paid by the State for armaments. The measure, he added, was one demanded by ordinary human morality.

The French people felt the scandal so keenly, that the Nationalisation Bill was voted almost without opposition. The law of August 11, 1936, provides that the government may, before March 31, 1937, decide, by decree, on the total or partial expropriation by the State of any concern engaged in the manufacture or trade in armaments, including anti-gas equipment.

> Any disagreement on the price to be paid is to be settled by arbitration. The procedure of arbitration is as follows: – The State and the expropriated firm appoint two arbiters; if these still fail to reach agreement, they co-opt a third arbiter; but if they are unable to agree on the choice of this third arbiter, his place will be taken by the First Judge of the Court of Appeal of the district where the expropriated firm is situated. His decision will be final. The government can take over the firm as soon as its expropriation has been decided upon – that is, without waiting for the completion of the arbitration procedure.
>
> The law further provides that all armaments firms, from the date of the promulgation of the law, can function only with the permission and under the control of the State.

After an inevitable preparatory period, the Blum Government began in October 1936 to tackle the problem in all seriousness. Decrees were signed providing for the nationalisation, by the recognised procedure, of the important Brandt Armaments Works, of the tank department of Renault's and of a number of smaller concerns.

Although the nationalisation of a 'monster' like Creusot presented obvious financial difficulties, the government nevertheless considered the possibility of acquiring at least a minor-

ity interest in the concern; and in any case, even Creusot had, by that time, come, in accordance with the law, under strict government control.

But the most startling progress of all was made, soon after the law was passed, in that part of the French armament industry which concerns aeroplanes. Already in October M. Pierre Cot, the enterprising young Air Minister and his staff of experts were carrying into practice a large scheme which meant, in effect, not only the nationalisation of all aeroplane production, but also a rationalisation and a great improvement in the industry's organisation and productive capacity; – a matter of vital importance, in the circumstances, to France's National Defence.

To show how this nationalisation works in practice, I can do no better than quote the statement made to me in November 1936 by M. Pierre Cot, the Minister of Air in the Front Populaire Government, when he received me in the dazzlingly modern Air Ministry in the Boulevard Victor, on the southern outskirts of Paris.

'In principle,' he said, 'every firm in this country manufacturing aeroplanes and aeroplane engines will be nationalised. But the whole problem of aeroplane production is a very peculiar one; and the problem of nationalisation is combined with two other problems of vital necessity – rationalisation and decentralisation. We want to kill three birds with one stone. You have to remember that our aeroplane industry was built up during the War in a very haphazard manner. Moreover, it was practically entirely concentrated in the Paris region, and it remained here after the War. The process of decentralisation has been in progress for some years past – the government has already spent twenty-five million francs on it – but the bulk of this work still remains to be done. Built up in a hurry – one might almost say improvised – the French aeroplane industry is run in a wasteful and inadequate manner. Many of the firms are badly equipped, badly situated and financially unsound – though in most cases the real sufferers have been not so much the manufacturers themselves as their shareholders. When the government orders, say, 100 aeroplanes, it has to split up the orders among four or five different firms, each using a different set of plant. The

usual process of nationalisation which would consist in the government's buying up all the shares, or a controlling interest can scarcely be applied to such an industry – especially one which is in constant process of evolution. What we want to buy up is the equipment we require for making an entirely fresh start. We have to pick and choose. We don't want to have anything to do with shares, companies' liabilities, and so on. If we are interested in, say, the plant of Bréguet, we offer them a price; if they accept our price, good and well; if not, we resort to the arbitration procedure provided by the law (in the case of engines, the method is different, as you shall see). Now, to buy a plant here, there, and everywhere, is not sufficient. The whole thing has to be co-ordinated; and that is why we have devised the following system:

'We have already founded a company with a capital of 100,000 francs (£1,000) – this is little more than a formality – of which two-thirds belong to the State. This company' – M. Cot here produced a large document of several pages, the statutes of the new company – 'is called the Société Nationale des Constructions Aéronautiques de l'Ouest. This Company represents one of the four or five companies to be founded, each of which will be in charge of the aeroplane production of a certain geographical division of France. The first company, which was founded on October 24, is commissioned by the Minister of Air to take charge of the co-ordination and super-management of the three former companies, for which it will substitute itself completely or in part: the Loire-Nieuport Company, the Bréguet Company, and the Moranc-Saulnier Company. It is called the "Western" Company because these three firms will transfer their mass production to this western division of France – the Nantes–St. Nazaire region. But one of the present factories, left behind in Paris, will be used for the western division as its prototype factory, while the industrial production – that is, serial production proper – will, as far as possible, be transported to Nantes and St. Nazaire.

'At present serial production rarely exceeds 30 or 40 units and we hope to bring it up to 150. We propose to use the same method in founding three or four other companies, the Sociétés Nationales de Constructions Aéronautiques of the

North (e.g. Caudebec in Normandy, near Le Havre), the Centre (Bourges, Clermont–Ferrand), the South-west (Bordeaux–Toulouse), and the South-east (Grenoble, etc.) – all parts of France more or less immune against invasion.

'By controlling and in fact owning these companies, the State can appoint the directors, committees and higher staff, fix salaries, deal with labour questions (in a public or semi-public concern like this there is always less labour trouble than in private concerns) organise research and co-ordinate the whole problem of industrial mobilisation and decentralisation. The decisions of the company will be subject to the approval of the State, represented by the Air Minister.

'By remaining private companies in principle, their work will have greater administrative subtlety and financial flexibility and less red tape. The workers will have their collective contracts as elsewhere, and the higher employees will work under individual contract. The administrative control will be carried out by officials of the Air Ministry, assisted by air engineers, who will be able to inquire into everything, and report to the Minister. The technical control will be done by the Manufacturing Service of the Air Ministry. The sale price to the State and to foreign governments will be fixed. Provision will be made for the remuneration of the private capital – one third – invested in the company. These private shareholders may, in many cases, be the expropriated firms themselves. Each of the four or five companies will have its Research Bureau and its Prototype Factory. There will be a central Co-ordination Committee for all the five companies, and a sales office for abroad.'

'How much will this expropriation cost?'

'About 400 million francs (£4,000,000),' M. Cot said.

'And how many firms do you propose to expropriate?'

'About eighteen – that is, all the aeroplane firms of any importance at all.'

'What are you doing about aeroplane engines, *Monsieur le Ministre*?'

'Here we have adopted an entirely different system. A convention is on the point of being concluded with the Hispano-Suiza on the following basis: the Minister of Air will found a national company with a capital of sixty millions

(£600,000), of which two thirds will be subscribed by the State. This company will, in future, manufacture all the Hispano-Suiza aeroplane material. It will rent the greater part of the Hispano-Suiza works and buy the means of production necessary for the manufacture of engines, etc., the Hispano-Suiza Company keeping only the premises and material necessary for research and experiments. The Hispano-Suiza Company will concede to the National Company an exclusive licence for the manufacture of its engines; will give it complete technical collaboration, and will be remunerated by a percentage on the turnover of the National Company for Hispano-Suiza material. A similar arrangement is under consideration with other aeroplane-engine works. The aeroplane firms that will not be expropriated – and there will be few of any importance – will continue to function under the control and licence system provided by the recent law and decrees.

'You see,' M. Cot concluded, 'that the whole problem is not only one of morality, but, especially in the case of aeroplanes, of efficient production and ultimately of National Defence. Financially, we cannot fail; for fortunately – or, I might say unfortunately – we can always be certain of one thing: orders. In the case of aeroplanes the money spent on expropriation is a good investment; we shall spend, say, 400 million francs on the plant; (the manufacturers will be only too glad to get all this ready cash); but our orders in a year will amount to 800 million.'[1]

The statement shows that the problem is a relatively simple one, and by no means impracticable, as some people in Britain and America have tried to show, in an effort to silence the public outcry against the 'Merchants of Death'.

If in this chapter I have had to dwell on technicalities, even at the risk of boring many readers, it is because both in England and America the opponents of nationalisation have always opposed technical arguments to the moral arguments of those revolted by the 'armaments scandal'. The French have shown that there is not only a moral case, but also a perfectly good technical case against the private manufacture of armaments.

[1] Interview in *Manchester Guardian*, November 9, 1936.

Even if the Front Populaire Government has nothing else to its credit – and no one can maintain this after the profound labour reforms of June – it will go down to history as the first government which went a long way towards the total abolition of the private armaments business.

CHAPTER XXI

LA ROCQUE AND DORIOT

COLONEL DE LA ROCQUE was, as the French say, *le grand vaincu*, 'the great vanquished' of the 1936 election. The 'Fascist Menace' had held an important place in the election campaign of the Left, and May 3, 1936, was rightly described as 'France's retort to the Sixth of February 1934'.

After the Election the Croix de Feu were in low spirits; and feeling was running high, among the rank and file, against Colonel de la Rocque, who had failed so completely in his election 'arbitration'.

Taking advantage of this feeling of defeat among the Croix de Feu and the other Fascist Leagues, the Blum Government issued, on June 18, a decree dissolving the Croix de Feu, the Solidarité Française, the Jeunesses Patriotes and the Francistes. While it was true that, since the famous 'reconciliation scene' of December 6, the Croix de Feu had changed their methods, and had abandoned their military exercises, the movement was still considered to be capable of mobilising a private army of some 30,000 or 40,000 men. And although it could be argued, in June, that the Croix de Feu were no longer a 'semi-military organisation' or 'private militia', the Blum Government thought it unnecessary to quibble over such fine legal points with the avowed enemies of the Republic. The moment was a propitious one for taking action against the Leagues; and, in any case, Left opinion in France was expecting the government to do something about it at once.

The Right-Wing Press naturally condemned the dissolution of the Croix de Feu as arbitrary; and M. de Kerillis, looking back on the first fortnight of the Blum Government's career, broke out in the *Echo de Paris* into loud lamentations over the 'old framework of the parliamentary régime that was being destroyed by these new government methods' – though,

until then, he had never had a good word to say for the democratic Republic, and was an avowed supporter of the Croix de Feu.

On the night following the dissolution decree the Croix de Feu published a *communiqué* in which they vigorously protested against the dissolution, and said that they would appeal against it to the Conseil d'État – for 'there are still judges in France'. Referring to the social work done by the affiliated Croix de Feu organisations, the *communiqué* added: 'Are the 80,000 needy families we have been supporting to go hungry in future?' This *communiqué* was issued to the Press at the Croix de Feu headquarters by Colonel de la Rocque in person. I still remember that 'historic' occasion.

When we got there soon after 11 p.m., the Colonel had not yet arrived. To keep us in good humour a young man wearing the Volontaires Nationaux badge, put before us a large tray of beer-glasses which were very welcome on that hot June night.

It was a bare little room on the first floor of a small house in the Avenue de Breteuil. Its only decorations were an autographed picture of the Colonel and a map of France divided into the eighteenth-century provinces (instead of departments). At last, shortly before midnight, Colonel de la Rocque walked into the room in his brisk dapper manner. He smiled and tried to look unperturbed. 'I am sorry to bother you at this time of night,' he said in his familiar, slightly rasping voice, 'for the occasion is not perhaps really as big as it looks. I have prepared a *communiqué* which will tell you what we think of it all.'

Leaning over his desk he read out a statement, fumbling about with his fountain-pen, adding a sentence here and crossing out a few words there. When this was over we waited for typed copies, talking informally to the Colonel. He is personally charming and simple in his manner, and one wondered whether his extraordinary lack of bombast was not one of the reasons for his setbacks. He was clearly not a demagogue or a great leader, in spite of his 800,000 followers, and he was totally unlike the bogyman of the Communist posters. Even on an occasion like this he could not find anything dramatic to say.

'We are not a semi-military body,' he remarked, 'and everybody knows it. We have changed our propaganda methods completely. The Conseil d'État will take up our case. No, really, a movement like the Croix de Feu cannot be dissolved. The government is foolish to think it possible. The Croix de Feu corresponds to a vital reflex of my country, and don't you think that every great movement – and the Croix de Feu *is* a a great movement – has to pass through a period of persecution?'

'How do you think the dissolution will be carried out, Colonel?' 'Ask me in a few days,' the Colonel replied. 'I haven't the vaguest idea.' He looked a little lost, and did not quite know what to say. 'You know we haven't any arms,' he added after some reflection. 'It is all nonsense what they say about us.'

'What do you think of the future of France, Colonel?' 'Oh, I am not Mme Thèbes to make prophesies!' He laughed in his best drawing-room manner. 'I do not think the outlook is rosy. But I do not think it is red either. My country will never be red. Our movement will always have an enormous following, and if we had run candidates in the election we should have got two million votes. But what was the good of it with that second ballot to upset the result? We did our arbitration, but it is not true that our tactics ever consisted in fighting for the Communist candidate. Only people steeped to the neck in petty party politics could have suggested it. But unofficially we have got thirty-eight deputies at the Chamber, and we shall see what they can do.'

'Are you going to run candidates in the next election?' 'The next election.' The Colonel smiled and shrugged his shoulders. 'It is a long way off. Who can tell what will happen in the next four years? Let us wait and see.'

'Wait and see' – a typical La Rocque phrase.

In practice the dissolution did not really amount to very much; though its moral effect was considerable, and many thousand members resigned from the Croix de Feu; – a few going over to the Communists – 'the only dynamic force in the country', and a certain number going over to the newly-formed French Popular Party of M. Doriot;

but many left without joining anything else. The dissolution itself consisted chiefly in the prohibition of badges; and the Minister of the Interior instructed the Prefects, on the day of the dissolution decree, 'to remove all signs and plates outside the offices of the dissolved Leagues, and to prohibit any public or private meetings between their members'.

Later the Conseil d'État rejected Colonel de la Rocque's appeal.

The Colonel responded to the dissolution of the Leagues by urging all their followers and sympathisers to protest against the dissolution by hanging tricolour flags out of their windows. The response was poor at first; though, after a few days, the 'window plebiscite' was quite a success in certain parts of Paris. Thus, in the 6th and 7th Arrondissement there was hardly a house without a flag, and in Auteuil there were many houses with a flag in almost every window. It was good business for the flag-makers. Tricolour rosettes also became very fashionable; and, whether they fitted or not into the general colour-scheme of the frocks and hats, nearly all the women among the paddock public wore such rosettes at the Grand Prix. This paddock public also made a point of greeting President Lebrun with stony silence.

During the second half of June and especially the first half of July the pro-Fascist elements also got into the habit of holding sporadic demonstrations in the Champs-Élysées every Saturday and Sunday night. On American Independence Day on Saturday, July 4, these young men had the good taste to greet a delegation of American War veterans, who had laid a wreath on the Unknown Soldier's grave, with cries of 'France for the French!'

On the following day the trouble was even more serious. At five o'clock a large procession of former members of the Croix de Feu suddenly appeared at the Étoile and marched down the Champs-Élysées. Young men and elderly men they were, all wearing tricolour rosettes instead of the prohibited badges. There must have been 15,000 of them, and as they marched twelve-deep down the avenue, they shouted, 'Vive La Rocque,' and the public on either side of the street responded by singing the Marseillaise.

The Croix de Feu procession was not interfered with by

the police, and after it had reached the Rond Point (half-way down the avenue) it turned into a side-street and dispersed. The purpose of the procession was to show that the Croix de Feu was still alive.

Large forces of police and Mobile Guards had in the meantime been brought into the West End. There were three lorries of Mobile Guards at the Chamber of Deputies, and many more in the lower part of the Champs-Élysées. But the main forces were concentrated between the Rond Point and the Étoile. It was a useful precaution, for after the march-past of the Croix de Feu the public on both sides of the avenue became increasingly obstreperous. Crowds of young men with tricolour rosettes gathered at several points singing the 'Marseillaise' and shouting *'Vive Chiappe,' 'Vive La Rocque,'* and *'Blum au poteau,'* and *'La France aux Français.'*

Cordons of Mobile Guards were obliged to divide the Champs-Élysées into 'sections' and the rioters were being driven southward by repeated police charges from one 'section' to the next. At the Café Fouquet a battle broke out between the demonstrators and the police. Iron chairs and soda siphons and beer glasses were thrown at the police, and one policeman was seriously injured.

As the crowds grew more vicious the baton charges became more frequent, and at one moment the mounted police had to be called out. They were greeted with the familiar cry of *'Assassins! Assassins! Assassins!'* Several demonstrators were struck in the baton charges, and I saw three young men taken to hospital with blood streaming down their faces. Cars were held up and their occupants insulted because they would not answer the Fascist salute. I saw a crowd of young men howling at a terrified woman and child in a bus – apparently because the child was wearing a red beret.

By eight o'clock, however, the Champs-Élysées was cleared, and the hundreds of private cars bringing home the Sunday excursionists could drive down the avenue unhindered.

It was hardly good tourist propaganda; for the foreign visitors in the Champs-Élysées were visibly dismayed as they saw their beer glasses snatched from under their noses and hurled at the police.

That day the Fascists claimed that this was 'only a rehearsal',

and that there would be some real fun on July 14. For, as distinct from the previous year, only the Front Populaire demonstration was authorised; and there was to be no counter-demonstration from the Right. In reality July 14 turned out quite differently from what was expected. It was, above all, the 'Fête Nationale'; and, especially during the military parade in the morning, the political rivalry between the Right and Left was displayed with an amazing degree of good humour. What happened was this.

Hundreds of thousands of Parisians had swarmed to the Esplanade des Invalides and to the Champs-Élysées to see the traditional military review. After days of rain, the day was marked by glorious summer weather, and Paris was resplendent in all its beauty. The President of the Republic, the members of the government, and the Diplomatic Corps were seated in the official tribune in front of the Grand Palais. Infantry, cavalry, motorised units, heavy artillery, tanks and armoured cars marched or drove past in rapid succession from the Invalides across the Pont Alexandre III, whose high equestrian statues glittered in the sun, and, after passing Clemenceau's statue, turned into the Champs-Élysées down to the Place de la Concorde.

The thirty-ton tanks rattled at high speed down the avenue, cracking the macadam as they drove along. Two hundred and twenty-two aeroplanes flew in perfect triangular formations across the capital. The sky was perfectly blue, and after the review was over, military planes engaged in 'sky-writing' the words 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité,' much to the delight of the people.

It was the most impressive military parade Paris had seen for years, and in the diplomatic tribune it was generally agreed that it left no doubt about France's military efficiency. One of the objects of the parade was to prove that the Front Populaire Government was fully as capable as any other of looking after the national defence of the country, and this object was fully achieved.

In past years the working class had not taken much interest in the military parade, and the public which cheered the army was mostly composed of conservative West End elements. But on this occasion the Left-Wing papers had urged their readers

to hail the 'Republican Army' on the morning of the 14th, and the crowd was an extremely mixed one.

There were, inevitably, some who feared that this mixing of the Left and Right in the Champs-Élysées might lead to unpleasant incidents. I watched the greater part of the review from the corner of the Champs-Élysées and the Place de la Concorde from the middle of an extremely mixed group of people. The edge of the pavement was crowded with young men wearing tricolour badges, but behind them stood a mass of people with Socialist and Communist badges. Children were perched on lamp-posts and looked eagerly at the troops over the heads of the crowds. Pedlars went round selling cakes, sweets, and badges. It was such a glorious summer morning that everybody seemed happy.

As the troops marched past the young men in front shouted *'La France aux Français!'* and those behind in exactly the same rhythm *'Le Front Populaire!'* Sometimes the Right cry drowned that of the Left and sometimes it was the other way round. 'Long live the Republican Army!' the Left shouted as the troops marched past. 'Long live the French Army!' the Right shouted, while an elderly man remarked 'Let it be both French and Republican' – a remark which met with approval from both sides.

The outstretched hands of the Fascist salute mingled with the clenched fists of the Front Populaire salute. 'Send the Croix de Feu to Coblence' (the town where the French emigrés assembled during the French Revolution), one part of the crowd shouted. 'Send the Communists to Moscow,' the other part replied. And then, when the marching military bands struck up the 'Marseillaise', Left and Right all joined in a single chorus, but when the last notes had died away the old game started again. *'Le Front Populaire!' 'La France aux Français!'* 'Down with La Rocque!' 'Down with the Soviets!' Everyone was enjoying the game enormously except one hysterical young man in Oxford bags who nearly wept with rage whenever the Left out-shouted the Right.

The little individual disputes between Left and Right were equally good-natured. 'The Soviet Government of Blum will be thrown out in a month,' a young man with a tricolour tie

declared with conviction. His opponent was an elderly workman with a cap and a Communist badge in the lapel of his coat. 'Shut up, you' – he looked for the right word – 'you ex-serviceman.'

Another workman joined in: 'Why do you shout "France for the French". Are we not French as well as you are? And, when it comes to the point, is not Taittinger (the Jeunesses Patriotes leader) the director of a German firm?'

At one point a large crowd of Communists suddenly burst into the 'Internationale'. The young Nationalists yelled and booed, and, turning round, stretched out their arms towards the Front Populaire crowd in the Fascist salute. The Communists advanced until their clenched fists touched the fingertips of the 'Fascist' hands. Then both groups burst into laughter.

The women were no less active than the men. A powerful young woman, a true descendant of the tricoteuses of the Revolution, with a red band round her head, perched high on her fiancé's shoulders, kept waving her fist at the army, crying *'Vive le Front Populaire'* in a shrill voice. A well-brought-up young lady, with a tricolour scarf, sang the first line of the 'Marseillaise' in the best soprano manner, but was told to shut up. An old woman with a black lace bonnet who started the 'Internationale' in a squeaky voice was more successful, for several others joined in.

The 'disputes' between the Left and Right continued as before. 'You Fascists should try to work in a factory. You would soon see how you would like it.' When the Fascists retorted, the men of the Left growled, 'Be silent, dissolved ones. You no longer exist.'

When the military review was over a typically Parisian thing happened. Left and Right began to discuss their respective politics in all seriousness. I heard a young Croix de Feu man explain to a group of Communists why he still believed in Colonel de la Rocque and why he had not joined Doriot. Among another group of people I heard a taxi-driver explain in great detail the advantages that farmers would derive from the newly-voted Wheat Board Bill. All along the Champs-Élysées and in the Place de la Concorde little groups argued peacefully, until it was time to go to lunch. The army

parade had created an extraordinary atmosphere of national unity and happiness.

The afternoon was taken up with the Front Populaire procession, the most immense procession Paris had ever seen. One half of the procession started at the Tuileries and marched down the rue de Rivoli to the Bastille, where it was joined by the second half of the processions coming from the Place de la République. The Colonne de Juillet in the Place de la Bastille, marking the spot where the old prison had stood, was gaily decorated with national flags, and with flags of the French provinces, and the large tribune and bandstand in front of it were surrounded by large panels with portraits of Robespierre, Marat, Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Victor Hugo, Barbusse and the obscure little workman from Lille who had composed the Internationale.

Over half a million people must have taken part in the procession, and nearly as many cheered them as they marched past. Tricolour flags, or flags combining the red and the tricolour, were far more numerous than in 1935, when the plain red flags were still in the overwhelming majority.

At the Place de la Nation, at the Eastern extremity of Paris, where the procession ended, a large tribune had been erected, and at six o'clock M. Léon Blum, M. Jouhaux, M. Thorez and others spoke to the enthusiastic multitude.

In the West the Right-Wing organisations had not been allowed to demonstrate, and large police forces were stationed all round the Champs-Élysées to prevent any 'improvised' processions. Thousands of Right-Wing people had, nevertheless, gathered in the avenue, for Colonel de la Rocque had given instructions to his supporters to drop individually a flower on the grave of the Unknown Soldier. Many of those who filed through the Arc de Triomphe also dropped their tricolour badges on the grave.

Later there were some clashes in the Champs-Élysées when people wearing Communist badges or waving red flags from motor-cars were pursued and molested.

In the evening thousands gathered on the banks of the Seine to see the fireworks, and as in previous years, there was much dancing at street corners to the music of more or less improvised bands.

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Little more was heard of the 'dissolved ones' for several weeks to come, except that the leaders of the Croix de Feu had formed a new Party, called the French Social Party. The first meeting was held in the Salle Wagram in July, and speeches were made by the Colonel, M. Ybarnégaray and Mermoz, the famous transatlantic airman.[1]

After that the Colonel and the faithful Ybarnégaray toured the country in the hope of reviving the faltering spirits of the ex-Croix de Feu and the ex-Volontaires Nationaux.

As in 1935, so also in 1936 the Croix de Feu made a sudden *rentrée* about the 1st of October. This time the *rentrée* took a peculiar form. On Friday, October 2, the French Social Party called a mass-meeting at the Vélodrome d'Hiver in Paris, but at the last moment M. Salengro, the Minister of the Interior, prohibited it – for there was danger that the Socialists and Communists would attempt to hold a counter-demonstration against the 'Fascists' around the Vélodrome. Unfortunately, it so happened that the Communists were going to hold a meeting of their own in the Parc des Princes, the west-end stadium at the Porte de St. Cloud, two days later.

This meeting was not prohibited; and, after the prohibition of the Vélodrome meeting, the Colonel, and, with him, the Press of the Right, raised a loud protest against this unfair discrimination. The French Social Party, the Colonel said, was a legally constituted body; and he decided that M. Salengro's challenge could not remain unanswered.

Since (he said in substance) the Communists had been allowed to hold a large meeting in the Parc des Princes the Croix de Feu must make a point of protesting against such unfair discrimination by holding a counter-demonstration in the neighbourhood.

M. Salengro thereupon explained that the 'discrimination' was due to the fact that, while the Parc des Princes was surrounded by wide spaces which could easily be controlled by the police, the Vélodrome d'Hiver was surrounded by a labyrinth of narrow streets where anything might happen.

The explanation did not satisfy the Croix de Feu – nor the

[1] He and his companions lost their lives in the South Atlantic in the following December.

Communists for that matter, who claimed that the Croix de Feu had been dissolved and must remain dissolved, whereas in reality they continued to constitute a semi-military organisation. The *Humanité* advocated the arrest of Colonel de la Rocque.

On Saturday night the rumour went round that the Croix de Feu were proposing to occupy overnight the Parc des Princes, the stadium where the Communist meeting was to take place. To prevent this, the Communists themselves occupied the stadium during the night.

On Sunday afternoon, October 4, 20,000 police and Mobile Guards were concentrated in the south-west quarter of Paris, where the Conservative quarter of Auteuil meets the working-class suburbs of Boulogne and Billancourt. The task of preventing serious clashes between the two rival bodies was not an easy one, and the business of cordoning off this or that street and of driving off the crowds of Croix de Feu men who were going too near the stadium was carried out with great skill. Police aeroplanes continued to circle over that part of Paris all the afternoon.

At no moment were the Croix de Feu forces assembled into a single counter-demonstration. The largest single body I saw was one of 2,000 young men in the Boulevard Exelmans waving tricolour flags and shouting '*Vive La Rocque!*' A Communist woman who waved a clenched fist at them was in serious danger of being beaten up but for the intervention of a Croix de Feu leader, who urged his followers 'not to hit her'.

On the steps of the parish church of Auteuil a crowd of Croix de Feu people had gathered giving the Fascist salute and shouting 'France for the French'. There had been a fight in the square in front of the church a few minutes earlier and there was still some blood on the pavement. Taxis carrying Communists to the meeting down the Avenue de Versailles had stones thrown at them, and the street was littered with milky-coloured fragments of safety glass. A number of people in cars were slightly injured. Several of these taxis with their windows broken were later stationed outside the police station.

At the corner of the Boulevard Exelmans I saw the police

pounce on a crowd of Fascists who were shouting vociferously '*Vive La Rocque*'. One of them, a bearded young man looking like Alfred de Musset, was grabbed by the hair at the back of his head and dragged into a police van. Once seated in the van, he grinned broadly at the crowd. Here and there some serious fights broke out. I saw one Fascist badly beaten by a group of Communists, and several other clashes, as a result of which young men belonging to both sides had to be taken to hospital with blood streaming down their faces.

Numerous ambulances were rushing all over the district and a policeman told me, shaking his head, that some of the injured he had seen were 'in a mighty queer state'. Others were injured in truncheon charges. In numerous places the Croix de Feu had set up dressing-stations of their own, marked with tricolour flags.

A café near the stadium crowded with Croix de Feu men, and also with many women and children, was at one moment surrounded by an angry crowd of Communists. The police were obliged to cordon off the café so as to allow the people inside to escape by a side-street. Thereupon the café was locked up.

Most of the people living in Auteuil are naturally sympathetic to the Croix de Feu, and when a young man with a bandage round his head was brought home to one of the large blocks of flats near the Porte de St. Cloud he was loudly cheered by people in hundreds of windows.

While these sporadic fights were going on over a large part of Auteuil and the police were manœuvring with great skill to prevent any major clashes, the Communist meeting in the Parc des Princes went on as usual. From the outside one could hear the speeches by Thorez and Duclos transmitted by loud-speakers. From time to time the crowd of 50,000 which had assembled in the stadium would sing the Internationale. The stadium was decorated with red flags and also with the flags of 'Soviet France', a red flag with a small tricolour in the top left-hand corner. They closed the meeting by singing the Marseillaise. By that time the roads round the stadium had been cordoned off and the Communists dispersed without any serious trouble.

Later in the evening, however, large pro-Fascist crowds

assembled in the Champs-Élysées shouting and singing. However, nothing serious happened. Several hundred arrests were made by the police. About a hundred people were injured, half a dozen sufficiently seriously to stay several days in hospital.

While the Fascist counter-demonstration was in many respects a complete failure, Colonel de la Rocque had nevertheless achieved his principal object – which was to show that the Croix de Feu could still be troublesome.

The day caused some damage to the Communists. The thought of having to be protected by 20,000 police against the 'dissolved' Fascists was a humiliating one; and in one of his subsequent conflicts with the Communist leaders, M. Paul Faure, the Secretary-General of the Socialist Party, could not resist the temptation of 'rubbing it in'.

Two days after the Parc des Princes affair the government decided to prohibit, until further notice, all meetings in the Paris Region 'liable to provoke contrary political reactions'. The meetings the government had in mind were both the Communist and Fascist meetings. The Communists, 'one of the great Front Populaire parties', protested loudly against 'being put on the same level as the Fascists'.

Simultaneously legal action (of a rather innocuous kind) was taken against the ex-Croix de Feu leaders.

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While the Croix de Feu – or rather, the Parti Social Français – were at their lowest, a rival organisation appeared on the scene in the summer of 1936. It was the Parti Populaire Français, founded by Jacques Doriot, the former Communist leader and Mayor of St. Denis.

Doriot, a solidly-built man with a strong chin, curly black hair and tortoise-shell glasses – a black-haired Danton his admirers call him – began as a workman and became in time the parliamentary leader of the Communist Party. Then, in 1934, he put forward a proposal for something on the lines of the Front Populaire – a coalition between the Communist, Socialist and Radical elements of the country; for (said he) France being only one-fifth proletarian, nothing can be achieved without the support of the *petite bourgeoisie*. He was expelled from the Communist Party as a heretic; though soon afterwards the Communists adopted the idea themselves.

Doriot never forgave them. In the Senate elections in October 1935, he joined forces with Laval; and during the discussion of the Franco-Soviet Pact in February 1936, he denounced his former comrades with extraordinary violence. Amid loud cheers from the Right of the Chamber, he accused them of taking money from Moscow and of wishing to drag France into a war against Germany for the benefit of the Soviet Union, with a Bolshevik revolution in France as the ultimate objective. About the same time he gave a number of interviews to German papers in which he advocated a French *rapprochement* with Germany against Russia. In the 1936 election, he was returned for St. Denis, for years his stronghold, by only a narrow majority of 500 votes over his Communist competitor.

And then at the end of June Doriot founded his new party. Its programme, rather flimsy, is reminiscent of the so-called 'programme' of the Croix de Feu. It denounces Communism and internationalism as enemies, and demands: a reform of the republican state; the creation of stable government (a phrase reminiscent of Doumergue); the creation of Economic Assemblies representing all the economic forces of the nation; the detachment of Parliament, the government, the judiciary, the administration, and the Press from the influence of the financial oligarchy (which is otherwise, presumably, to remain intact), defence of the workers, artisans, peasants and middle class (whatever that means); stimulation of trade between France and her colonies (an autarchist formula); various reforms concerning education, town-planning, etc., which would tend to make the French 'a stronger and healthier race'; and the resurrection of a France capable of playing 'her traditional role in fostering human progress, justice, peace and the friendship between nations'. Such is M. Doriot's 'programme'. Rather thin. His 'French Empire' programme is, like everything else, in flat contradiction with his earlier ideas. In the past he was a passionate supporter of the natives against French Imperialism, and visited and supported Abdel Krim during the Riff rebellion.

But, unlike La Rocque, Doriot is not handicapped by being an aristocrat. He is personally a brave man, as he showed during the Communist riots of February 9, 1934.

But he suffers deeply from thwarted ambition. Many of the people who supported the Leagues and the Royalists financially and otherwise took, at first, a fancy to the new party. Its paper, *L'Emancipation Nationale* was (and still is) sold on the boulevards and read by much the same public as the Royalist *Action Française*. De-luxe booklets were published full of sentimental pictures of Doriot in his 'humble little home' at St. Denis, of his two little daughters, of the sofa he sleeps on, and of his pair of bedroom slippers. The text was provided by people like Pierre Dominique and Bertrand de Jouvenel – the Jouvenel of the famous 'pro-French' Hitler interview a week before Hitler denounced Locarno, a young man with a passion for Hitlerite 'dynamics', and a great believer in Franco-German unity at the expense of Russia. Dominique, though older, is of the same mettle. Though nominally a man of the Left, he is a great admirer of Mussolinian 'dynamics', and was violently pro-Italian and anti-British during the Abyssinian conflict. Paul Marion, an amateur economist, who has gone through half a dozen newly-formed parties in the last two years, joined the group. So Doriot has a few 'progressive' Fascist intellectuals to help him. On the other extreme are his supporters from Marseilles, an altogether disreputable gang associated with the shadiest possible side of the 'Tammany Hall' politics of that great city.

I happened to attend, in November 1936, the first National Congress of the Parti Populaire Français. It was held at St. Denis, that strange city ten miles north of Paris, where the tombs of the French Kings are surrounded by some of the grimiest slums of the industrial *banlieue*.

At the Municipal theatre of St. Denis, a tawdry, old-fashioned building, now decorated with tricolour flags, with P.P.F. embroidered on them, Doriot spoke for hours, denouncing, in his stentorian voice, his former Communist comrades and the hand of Moscow. It was to be expected.

What interested me more was the human material of which the Doriotists were composed. There were 800 delegates at the Congress, and most of them lunched in the big hall of the famous Hotel du Grand Cerf, next to the church with the Royal Tombs. The largest number of the tables had been

reserved for 'Marseille'. Around these sat M. Sabiani, and his *nervi* – a tough-looking crowd of gangsters. There were several negroes among them. At my table – which happened to be the table of the 'Lyons Federation' – I was seated next to a commercial traveller, who had never belonged to any party before, and who declared the Blum Government to have failed in its labour reforms. 'It has done some good only to the labourers; but it has harmed the qualified worker, whose economic status has been lowered by all this trade union tendency towards "equality" and human standardisation.' Opposite me sat an elderly shopkeeper from Cannes, with all the characteristics of a henpecked husband, who had gone off to Paris for a few days – with the Congress as a good excuse for getting away. He had belonged to the Croix de Feu, but had felt that La Rocque had not been 'energetic enough'. As for Doriot, he confessed that he wasn't greatly interested in his programme; but he *did* feel that Doriot was right to fight against Communism.

While, from the platform of the Théâtre Municipal, in the best manner of Dorgères, a 'rural delegate' was denouncing parliamentary methods of government as, 'if you'll excuse my expression, *une grande couillonnade*', I joined, in the theatre bar, the young aristocrats and intellectuals of the party: Bertrand de Jouvenel, Bertrand de Maud'huy, and others. They were obviously enjoying themselves in this 'dynamic' atmosphere; – though I am not sure that they were taking it all very seriously. The party had, obviously, not 'caught on' as much as the curiosity it aroused at first had suggested.

I was shown a list of 600 delegates, with their political origin. About 150 were former Communists – mostly from St. Denis, who had followed Doriot; about as many, former Fascists (Croix de Feu, Solidarité Français, etc.); some 250 had come from 'nowhere', while the other parties had provided only a handful between them. It rather confirmed the impression that the party was largely composed of nondescript elements – a sort of Foreign Legion of French politics. At that time, the party claimed a membership of 100,000.

'Why,' I asked, 'did Doriot want to have such disreputable people as the Marseilles *nervi* in his party?' 'Every dynamic party,' I was frankly told, 'has got to have its thugs.' 'Do you

propose to run candidates, or do you believe in direct action?' 'No, old parliamentary methods are not much good; as for direct action – everything will depend on the circumstances. Suppose there is a Communist uprising; – that's when we'll come forward and stamp out the Communists.'

That night there were some fights in the streets of St. Denis between the Doriotists and the local Communists. The police of St. Denis seemed to be very much on Doriot's side. The Communists shouted *'Doriot à Berlin!'*

The movement is an incoherent one; – and it has no *mystique* beyond its hatred of Communism. It is doubtful whether it will come to much. During the summer months of 1936, when the Croix de Feu were suffering from a sense of defeat, it looked as though Doriot might attract a large number of La Rocque's men. But since the partial 'rehabilitation' of the Croix de Feu after the Parc des Princes affair, they must have felt that Doriot was not, after all, even a good substitute for La Rocque. For one thing, there was something about Doriot that was not quite 'genuine'. He was now denouncing the Communists; but for ten years he had been a Communist himself and had thought it all right to take money from Moscow, and if he 'saw the light', it took him an extraordinarily long time to see it. Sabiani & Co. must also go against the grain of the well-washed young men of the Croix de Feu.

It is curious that, after a few weeks of sympathetic interest in Doriot, whom they proclaimed (usually with a question mark) 'the man of to-morrow', the Press of the Right dropped him.

In the eyes of the working-class Doriot is a 'traitor', and he can hardly expect much support from them, and any Communists who are disgruntled with their own leaders, can always go over to the Socialists – but why to the 'traitor'? For one thing, Doriot's earlier association with Laval has not gained him any sympathy among the working class. Laval, though sympathetic to the movement at first, later became more careful about identifying himself with it in any way.

At the end of 1936 Doriot still depended, in the main, on people who, somehow, did not fit in anywhere, or who wanted an easy way of getting a little personal publicity.

In so far as Doriot is in competition with La Rocque, his movement is, if anything, welcomed by the Left; for it is apt to split up the Fascist forces. Doriot may have his groups at St. Denis, as his friend Sabiani has his gangs at Marseilles; but they are of little more than nuisance value.

There is just a remote possibility that Doriot might some day be pushed into the limelight by some entirely new international situation when his greatly advertised pro-Germanism and anti-Sovietism would be of use. But it is only a remote possibility.

As a constructive political force neither La Rocque, nor Doriot counted for much at the end of 1936. The Blum Government was succeeding too well to suit their purpose.

CHAPTER XXII

'AEROPLANES FOR SPAIN!'

Robert Dell (ringing up from Geneva, and very indignantly): 'I say, there is no need for a Fascist Government in France; the Fascists will always find a Left Government to carry out their policy.'

At any other time, the arrival in power of the Front Populaire Government would have been hailed as the beginning of a new era in international affairs. The government would have been expected to bring about a *redressement* in French foreign policy, as remarkable as the *redressement* of 1924, when the Cartel des Gauches reversed the Ruhr policy of Poincaré and devised the Geneva Protocol.

Unfortunately, if, in 1924, Herriot had a basis to work on; namely, the League, whose possibilities had not yet been properly explored, there was no such basis in June 1936.

It is only fair to say that when the Blum Government came into power, the international situation was in a more hopeless mess than it had ever been. Germany had got away with the Locarno coup; and the Italians had entered Addis-Ababa.

To reverse the policy of Laval was the avowed intention of the Blum Government; and its watchword was 'loyalty to the League'; – but unfortunately, the League was in ruins, and, in an immediate practical sense the phrase was as good as meaningless.

The policy of the Blum Government may be summed up in a few words: caution; and *rapprochement* with England. The first thing to do was to prevent Germany from driving in a wedge betweeen England and France – the greatest of all Hitler's ambitions. For the rest, time would show whether the restoration of anything resembling a League order could still be achieved. It was no good 'talking big' about collective security so soon after the terrible Abyssinian fiasco. The policy of 'England First' had, as we shall see, its strong points, as well as its weak points.

The first international problem with which the Blum Government was faced were the economic sanctions against Italy, which were still going on, although Italy had won the war. They were not serving any great purpose; but the problem was a delicate one; for the end of sanctions meant the formal acceptance of the accomplished fact and the recognition that the League had been defeated.

'What are you going to do about sanctions?' I asked a well-known deputy who, a few days later, was to become a member of the Blum Government. He reflected for a moment. 'We shall do what England does,' he said. 'If England raises sanctions, we shall raise sanctions. If England continues sanctions, we shall continue them.' 'And what if England decides to strengthen sanctions by say, closing the Suez Canal?' 'Then,' he replied, 'we shall do the same. Only – she isn't going to do it, is she?' he asked, a little anxiously.

A week or two before becoming Premier, Blum wrote in the *Populaire*, among other protestations of loyalty to the League: 'We shall make every effort to save what still remains to be saved of international law in the Abyssinian affair.' Later, however, he simply decided to follow Britain's lead.

When on June 16, the British Cabinet decided to stop sanctions against Italy, the French Government did not protest. In a way, it was pleased with itself. By saying that it would do 'anything' that Britain proposed, it prevented the British Government from placing on France the blame for this surrender to Italy.

But at the same time, certain members of the French Government – and particularly M. Delbos – believed that once sanctions were cleared out of the way, it would again be possible to make friends with Italy; and several papers spoke of the 'reconstruction of the Stresa Front'! They were encouraged in this belief by the comparatively mild tone of the Italian Press during May and the first part of June, and by stories of Italy's urgent need of money. Alas! the moment sanctions were raised, Mussolini made a long nose at France and England, and proclaimed his friendship for Germany. Many of the French had thought that they would avert this danger by raising sanctions. The formal collaboration between the two dictators began from the moment – and no sooner! – the

League and the democratic countries had surrendered to Italy.

The League, controlled disarmament, and all that sort of thing, had for years held an important place in the programme of the Socialist Party and also in the programme of the Front Populaire. But so soon after the Abyssinian fiasco the conditions for 'talking big' about the League were particularly unfavourable. The Small Powers who, by joining in the sanctions policy, had made great economic sacrifices to the League, were thoroughly disgusted, and it was not easy to restore confidence in the League. To say that sanctions had been applied 'belatedly and incompletely' and that 'one might do better next time' was not very reassuring. To produce another 'peace plan', after twenty 'peace plans' had failed would have done no good either. The Blum Government decided to try out a new method. 'Let's not have anything big and ambitious,' it said in substance, 'but just a few simple suggestions which, if accepted, will make all the difference in the world.' In the Chamber, on June 23, M. Delbos, the new Foreign Minister, proposed that the Covenant be not amended (which would set up a dangerous precedent), but supplemented by a certain number of 'interpretative texts'. After deploring that sanctions had been applied too late and incompletely, M. Delbos said that, in any case, economic sanctions alone could not, in his opinion, stop a war, once it had already started.

> 'The ideal application of Article Sixteen' he said, 'would consist in military sanctions being used against the aggressor by all the members of the League, but this is too much to expect from nations not directly affected by the conflict. Collective action must therefore be divided into two sets.
>
> 'First there must be a group of Powers which, for geographical reasons, or through common interest, are prepared to use military sanctions against the aggressor; but at the same time all the members of the League, without exception, must help the victim of aggression, by applying to the aggressor economic and financial sanctions. Such regional pacts of mutual assistance must not be directed against anyone and must be open to all.'

M. Delbos's second proposal concerned the rule of unanimity on the League Council. This rule, he said, must be

changed, as it paralysed the working of Article Eleven of the Covenant. It was nonsense that a State threatening peace should be in a position to hamper the action of other members of the League.

Later he carted his proposals round Geneva; but without much success.

In the same speech at the Chamber on June 23, he expressed the humble conviction that 'Italy would co-operate'. 'We should be glad,' he said, 'if her efforts could be gradually harmonised with our own and those of the other interested parties.' He was referring to the 'New Locarno'. He also said that the conclusion of the Danubian and Mediterranean Pacts must be hastened. Finally, he said something about setting up the 'Control Commission' of the Disarmament Conference and about convening the European Commission founded, many years before, by the late M. Briand. Germany would be welcome to join in the discussion. He deplored Germany's failure to reply to the British questionnaire of May 6; but said that Herr Hitler had often proclaimed his wish to be friends with France. 'We have no intention of doubting the words of a man who, during four years, knew the horror of the trenches.'

Coming so soon after the Locarno coup, such compliments must have convinced Herr Hitler that there was not much to fear from the French Government. He was right. The Austro-German Pact, which, a few years earlier, would have caused violent diplomatic commotion in Europe, scarcely created a ripple at the Quai d'Orsay; and the Danzig *coup* of July 17, when the Nazi Senate abolished the Danzig Constitution, caused something of an outcry in the Press (which charged Colonel Beck with treachery), but no more. Already some time before, Captain Greiser, the President of the Danzig Senate, had, with impunity, cocked a symbolic snook at the League Council. There was nothing to be done.

On July 22, M. Blum and M. Delbos went to London, where, together with their British colleagues, they drew up a plan for a new Locarno Conference. The question whether this Locarno Conference could be held independently of a more general settlement (for the French, at any rate, could not

openly limit their peace-making to the West alone) was left a little vague.

> 'If progress can be made at this meeting [i.e., the meeting of the Locarno powers], 'the *communiqué* said, 'other matters affecting European peace will necessarily come under discussion. In such circumstances it would be natural to look forward to the widening of the area of discussion, in such manner as to facilitate, with the collaboration of the other interested Powers, the settlement of those problems the solution of which is essential to the peace of Europe.'

Invitations were sent accordingly to Berlin and Rome; but they met with no favourable response. At Nürnberg, some time later, Hitler said that, whatever else might be done, he was not on speaking terms with the Russians; – which meant that he would not welcome any 'widening of the area of discussion'.

M. Blum and M. Delbos made an excellent impression in London; and the people at the Foreign Office said that they had never yet met any French Ministers who were 'so easy to get on with'.

Some of M. Blum's and M. Delbos's critics felt that this dependence on England was going to unnecessary extremes; that, to please England, France was visibly neglecting Russia and the Little Entente, and was being almost unduly polite to Germany. These criticisms were to gain in strength in connection with Dr. Schacht's visit to Paris at the end of August, and, still more in connection with the Spanish Civil War. The severest critics of Blum were the Communists. They were greatly offended by the polite reception M. Blum had given to Dr. Schacht. Hitler's Minister had arrived in Paris two days after the doubling of the term of service in the German Army; and he had come to assure the French that this measure was 'not directed against them'. 'Against whom then?' the Communists asked. And they thought it highly unfortunate that the Premier of the Front Populaire Government should lunch and have long talks with *such* a person.

Not that the talks amounted to anything in particular. This policy of 'keeping in' with Germany, after all her acts of provocation, and Blum's refusal to agree to a Franco-Soviet Military Convention (which would supplement the otherwise

rather platonic Franco-Soviet Pact) had, in the view of the Communists, been dictated by Blum's supreme desire to do nothing that would even worry England.

. . . . . .

During the second half of 1936 the international situation was dominated by the Spanish Civil War. It broke out about the middle of July, and, almost immediately, the question arose: what shall the French Government do?

On the face of it, the answer was clear: there was no reason why the legal government of Spain should not have a right to *buy* armaments abroad, even if, for one reason or another, these could not be supplied to it free of charge by sympathetic governments.

But it became clear, before long, that the civil war in Spain was not a purely internal affair; for the Rebels were being supported, possibly from the day the rebellion had broken out, by the Fascist Governments of Germany and Italy. A victory for the Rebels would obviously be a disaster for France. It would – or at least might – mean a Spain under Italian or German influence; Spanish Morocco would be thrown open to Italian or German penetration, with the inevitable repercussions in French Morocco, and in the Mediterranean in general; it would mean that the Balearic Islands would be controlled or owned by Italy, whose task of cutting France's communications with North Africa in case of war would be enormously facilitated. 'And it would be the last straw,' a Frenchman told me at the end of July, 'if, in addition to all our worries, we were obliged in future to maintain an army along the Pyrénées!'

The case for supporting the Spanish Government seemed overwhelming. Not only was the Spanish Government ideologically the friend of the French Front Populaire Government, but – what was infinitely more important – it was the friend of France.

French flags were being flown in the streets of Madrid, while General Queipo de Llano, speaking on July 29 on the Seville wireless, was appealing to Germany, Italy and Britain for arms and munitions, and announcing that once they came into power, the Nationalists would 'break with France'.

The arms and munitions did not fail to arrive. On July 30,

the very day after the General's speech, five mysterious aeroplanes were seen flying over Algeria, and, soon afterwards, one of them crashed, and the other had a forced landing, just before reaching Spanish Morocco. Both were military planes and the men inside were Italian officers. The inquiry made by the French authorities showed that they had been mobilised for service in Spain *three days before the outbreak of the Rebellion.*

On the very day of the Algerian incident, M. Delbos, the Foreign Minister, had spoken before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber with much appreciation of the assurances of neutrality received from the Italian Government earlier in the day! During that last week in July strange things were happening in France. Already the French Government was issuing one denial after another of the allegations that armaments and munitions were being, or had been, sent to the Spanish Government, and, in the Chamber lobbies on July 30, when I asked a member of the Government what the fuss was all about, and why the Spanish Government could not at least *buy* what it wanted in France, he raised his arms to heaven and whispered mysteriously: *'Vous comprenez, c'est très délicat, TRÈS DÉLICAT!'*

It was *délicat* for a number of reasons. First, because, in a speech earlier in the week, Sir Samuel Hoare had treated the Spanish Government and the Rebels as 'rival factions' – and it was clear what *that* meant: Britain would be neutral, or (since the Spanish Government was not a 'faction'), worse than neutral. Secondly, because the French Press of the Right has started a furious campaign in favour of the Rebels, and against the 'Reds'. Since the Rebels were the avowed enemies of France, the campaign was, on the face of it, a thousand times more monstrous than even the campaign, a year earlier, in favour of Italy and against Abyssinia and the League. But no! *Le Jour* and other papers denounced the French Government under giant headlines for supplying the Spanish Government surreptitiously with guns and aeroplanes. These articles were, naturally, reproduced in facsimile by the German Press. There was also a young man who wrote in *Paris-Soir:* 'How well I was rewarded for my efforts when I saw the smile of General Mola!' And, after comparing him to Napoleon, the

same young man went on to describe how he had counted fifty Front Populaire corpses and how he had personally attended the execution of two Communists. (It was a little too much even for *Paris-Soir* with a large working-class public – and the young man was sacked.)

The Right-Wing papers not only declared that *they* would not tolerate any intervention on behalf of the Spanish Government, but one of them went so far as to appeal to Hitler, asking him to prevent the French Government from supplying arms to the Spanish Government. 'Germany,' it said, 'should never allow it.'

The 'Fascist International' was working at full blast; and was threatening to work up a part of French opinion into a state of frenzy with its stories of how Blum was trying to drag France into war for the benefit of his Spanish friends. It was *très délicat*: for there was a danger that any French intervention in Spain might plunge France into a war with Italy and Germany.

Before long, the Blum Government gave way. Already after its meeting on Saturday, August 1, it published a *communiqué*, which contained the following passage:

> The French Government has, for its part, observed up to now in the strictest fashion the decision not to authorise any exports of arms for Spain, even in execution of contracts made before the beginning of the trouble.

The statement contained a threat to the Fascist countries that if they continued to supply the Rebels, France would regain her freedom of action. Unfortunately, the Fascist countries had every reason not to be intimidated by this faint-hearted piece of bluff; and it was even possible that they would eagerly accept the challenge. Two days after the *communiqué*, M. Delbos, the Foreign Minister, showed how frightened he really was of any entanglements in Spain; and it was only too clear that the French Government's challenge to the Fascist countries could not be taken seriously: 'There must be no ideological crusade in Europe,' he said, 'a crusade which will inevitably end in war.' His statement was addressed to the French supporters of the Spanish Government, whom he warned of the inherent dangers of their policy.

On August 8, the Cabinet met again, and after a stormy

sitting, which lasted no less than four hours, it decided to prohibit the export of all war material to Spain, though 'reserving the right eventually to authorise the delivery of unarmed planes by private industry. . . . The government firmly expects that its attitude will facilitate the conclusion as speedily as possible of the definite agreement which is proposed in the interests of international peace.' The *communiqué* went on to say:

> 'Being informed on August 1 of certain facts concerning foreign supplies to the Rebels, the government made a pressing appeal to the States most directly concerned with a view to the adoption of common rules of non-intervention. With an eye on the march of events, and more and more convinced that competition between nations over support given either to the Spanish Republic or to the Rebels would involve a most dangerous menace to peace, the government on August 5 and 6, with the British Government's support, took a new initiative.
>
> 'It submitted to all interested Powers the text of a convention laying down the precise rules which would make it possible to render common undertakings effective. Replies in principle which have reached the government to date justify the hope of an early solution.'

The reference to Great Britain was interesting. But it was not sufficiently revealing to all those Frenchmen who were revolted by the 'blockade' against the Spanish Government, and who wished to know what exactly had determined the Blum Government to take this extraordinary action, without any certainty that its example would be followed. And was there not a terrible danger that, while supplies had been cut off from the Spanish Government, the Fascist countries would delay their reply to the French proposal and intensify in the meantime their shipments of armaments to the Rebels, to the extent of assuring their victory over the Spanish Republic?

There were many who, remembering Blum's earlier campaign in favour of unilateral disarmament – 'an example of high morality which is bound to be followed' – condemned his unilateral non-intervention decision as highly quixotic. It was obvious, however, that Blum's alleged belief in Hitler's and Mussolini's international conscience and sense of fair play was not the real reason – or, at any rate, not the only reason – for the unilateral non-intervention decision that the French

Cabinet took at its famous meeting of August 8. One reason for this decision was British pressure; the other reason, equally important, was the determination of M. Delbos and certain other Radical Ministers to adhere wholly to the British policy of abstention. In the course of the discussions M. Delbos actually threatened to resign if any other course were taken, – and so to break up the government.

There is, of course, not the slightest doubt that, about August 1, the British Government clearly intimated to the French Government that if, as a result of her 'competition' with Italy and Germany in sending arms to Spain, France were attacked by the Fascist countries, Britain would not consider the attack an unprovoked one, and *the Locarno guarantee would not come into operation.*

M. Zyromski, the Left-Wing Socialist leader, even specified, at a Paris public meeting on September 16, that it was shortly before the Cabinet meeting of August 8, that the French Government received a visit from Sir George Clerk, the British Ambassador, and that Sir George 'uttered some very grave words', which proved of decisive importance at the subsequent Cabinet meeting. That the threat to suspend Locarno was uttered is unquestionably true.

The other story, which was current for a long time among French Socialists – namely, that the British Government told the French Government at the beginning of August: 'If you support the Spanish Government, we shall support the Rebels,' is much more doubtful; and I have never had the actual words confirmed. 'No, they didn't put it quite *that* way,' a French Minister told me.

It must be said that this irresistible British pressure has been emphasised and over-emphasised by French Socialists for the obvious purpose of justifying the 'monstrous' decision of August 8 in the eyes of the Socialist and Communist rank and file. Thus, M. Zyromski said on September 16, that, while he was in total agreement with the Communist point of view, 'he did not wish to throw any stones at the Blum Government, for it was the British Government which had placed them in such an impossible position'.

This British pressure is undeniable; but it seems that on that occasion the Blum Government displayed an even more

than usual eagerness to please the British Government. Why did it not, instead, do on that occasion what it did in the case of the anti-Italian sanction: let Britain take the initiative? Why this hurry to blockade the Spanish Government, without any certainty that the non-intervention agreement would be concluded, still less, observed?

The answer is, as it was already on March 7, when Sarraut and Flandin refused to call the German bluff: fear, and the determination to avoid the risk of war at *any* price.

Actually, the chances are, that if the French Government had hastened to help the Spanish Government at the end of July and beginning of August, instead of stopping all supplies, the Rebellion might have been speedily suppressed. But M. Delbos did not want to take any such risks, – nor did England. And time worked for the Rebels.

The Fascist countries, Delbos said in substance, have chosen Spain as their battle-ground; we must not fall into their trap; we must keep out of it completely and absolutely; we must not give them even the slightest excuse for saying that we are 'competing' with them in Spain. This must be made absolutely plain.

What he meant was that the government's earlier assurances (at the end of July and on August 1) that no arms were being sent to Spain were not sufficiently convincing. The truth is that some arms and aeroplanes *had* been sent. But the problem was *très délicat*, and defenders of the government afterwards claimed that the whole 'delicacy' of the problem was overlooked not only by the French Communists and Trade Unionists, who kept clamouring for 'Aeroplanes for Spain', but, worse still, by the Spanish Government itself, which, by openly appealing to the French Government for help, was placing the question on an ideological basis. A leading member of the Blum Government told me some time later: 'It was a terrible mistake on their part. If the appeal for help had been made discreetly, we might have helped them a bit; but by yelling for help, they put our reactionaries and Fascists on their guard. At the end of July, the Ministry of Air was going to send them a number of aeroplanes; foolishly enough, they were placed in a row at Etampes, and our Fascists, who had already smelt a rat, had no difficulty in discovering them there.

The fat was in the fire. Even the most discreet help had to be stopped; for Franco's French friends were constantly spying on their own government, waiting for the slightest excuse to denounce it to the German Press.'

And the German Press was, of course, read in London; and there was at least one occasion when the British Government – though doing nothing to stop German and Italian shipments to the Rebels – thought it necessary to 'inquire' at the Quai d'Orsay about the German allegations that the Spanish militiamen (who, after the fall of Irun, had escaped to France,) had been allowed to re-enter Spain, together with their arms, on the Barcelona side. Although the French Government assured the British Government that the militiamen had returned to Spain unarmed, and that France had no reason for interning them – she had, in any case, quite enough refugees on her hands – the British Government nevertheless warned it against the 'terrible risks' it was taking in provoking the Germans!

Although the 'blockade' that was officially enforced by France on the Spanish Government on August 8 was not perhaps completely watertight, there is not the slightest doubt that anything that may have crossed from France into Spain since July 25, and especially since August 8 was mere driblets, compared with the enormous amount of war material sent to the Rebels. During August these shipments were completely unrestricted; later, after Germany and Italy had adhered to the non-intervention agreement, they were a little more discreet; but, with Portugal in the game, there was really nothing to prevent the Rebels from getting all that they required.

Actually, by delaying their final adherence to the non-intervention plan, the Italian and German Governments gained three precious weeks which enabled them to organise the Rebels on a solid military basis.

Feeling ran high among the French working class not only against Italy and Germany, but also against the Blum Government, which had 'taken sanctions against the legal government of Spain'. The Communists and the C.G.T. were particularly indignant, and their feelings were at first shared by many Socialists. The government *communiqué* on August 8 had, significantly enough, been hidden away in an inside page of the *Populaire*. Already on July 30, at a Socialist ceremony

in memory of Jaurès, Blum's pious recollections of Jaurès had been drowned in a chorus of cries:

'Des avions pour l'Espagne!'

As the 'blockade' continued through August, without even a formal acceptance of the non-intervention agreement by Italy and Germany, the 'dupe's game' into which the Blum Government had entered was denounced with increasing vigour. (At that time it was not yet generally known what part Britain had played in bringing about the 'surrender' of the French Government.)

After the frightful massacre of 2,000 people at Badajoz – a genuine 'atrocity', which had nothing to equal it even among the unverified 'Red' atrocities of the reactionary Press in France and England – the outcry became louder and louder, and when, after three painful weeks, Italy and Germany at last subscribed to non-intervention (and Germany's consent was followed a few hours later by a decree doubling the term of military service; – which was extremely suspect), the French working class no longer believed that the agreement would be observed by the Fascist countries.

Nothing stirred the imagination of the French people more than the battle of Irun, a stone's-throw from the French frontier. It was during those days that the feeling of solidarity with the Spanish Republic reached its highest pitch. On September 3, a vast meeting was held at the Vélodrome d'Hiver, where thousands had come to hear La Pasionaria, the Communist woman deputy for Oviedo, and the idol of the Spanish working class.

A few days earlier, on August 25, the *Action Française* had published one of the juiciest atrocity stories ever invented by the 'anti-Red' Press:

> In Madrid, the Soviet leader Dolores Uribari [they had even got her name wrong], known as La Pasionaria, saw a poor monk go along the Alcala Street. In the presence of a savage crowd, she threw herself at him and biting through the veins in his neck, killed him.

And that was the woman who had come to Paris to speak on behalf of the Spanish Government!

'Aeroplanes for Spain!' Twenty times in the evening the cry went up from thousands of people, and echoed through

the vast Vélodrome d'Hiver. Thirty thousand people – many of whom had lined up in the queues two hours before the beginning of the meeting – had come to hear her.

Long before the meeting had opened every inch of space in the galleries round the vast cycling-track was filled. The platform was draped in the colours of Republican Spain – red, yellow and purple – and above it were hung numerous French and Spanish flags. A streamer across the whole of the back of the hall said, 'aeroplanes and guns for Spain'. A brass band in front of the platform was playing Spanish and French songs and the *Internationale*.

There were at first several French speakers – M. Belin, representing the trade unions; M. Marty, the Communist Deputy, and several others, as well as a young man representing the Catalan militia.

They all demanded the reason for the 'blockade' against the Spanish Government and against the *sans culottes* of Spain who were fighting for the freedom of Spain as well as for the freedom of Europe while Hitler and Mussolini were supplying the Rebels with war material. Twenty-four Italian aeroplanes had been landed at Vigo, according to the latest news, and, while this was going on, they said, the French Government was refusing to raise the embargo and to do anything for the Spanish people. There were cries of 'shame'.

The arrival of La Pasionaria at the meeting was greeted with frantic cheering. She was a tall woman, wearing a plain black dress, with a calm sad face – one of the finest faces one had ever seen. This miner's wife, with her hair turning grey, had all the noble beauty of the Basque race. When she smiled, she smiled sadly and with some bitterness. How absurdly unlike the female ogre of the *Action Française*!

Numerous delegations carrying flowers crowded round La Pasionaria. She kissed the women and little children who brought her the bouquets and wreaths. Many women had tears in their eyes.

She then spoke. She spoke in Spanish. Few people in the audience understood exactly what she said, but the effect of her speech was overwhelming. It was the most beautiful voice ever heard on any French public platform. It had the mellow tone of a viola. She never screamed; her modulations and her

transitions from soft to loud were gentle and scarcely perceptible; but the anguish in her voice when she spoke of the men now dying in Irun, the bitter irony when she spoke of the generals, the anger when she mentioned Hitler and Mussolini, the pathos when she appealed to France and the French people, whose battle was being fought by the Spanish Republicans – all these emotions communicated themselves to the spellbound audience.

And then she appealed to the women of France and begged them to realise that the Spanish boys who were dying for liberty were also dying for France and for the peace of Europe, and that they must be helped, and that bravery, however great, was helpless against tanks and aeroplanes and armoured cars. This woman was clearly speaking for the men who, at that very moment, were fighting against overwhelming odds at Irun, and for the men and women who had been massacred at Badajoz and, in general, for the people suffering from this horrible war.

> 'Unarmed, with heroism as their only weapon, our people can now fight only with the weapons they have captured from the Rebels,' she said. 'These Rebels have massacred the whole population of Badajoz. At Baena they have massacred 270 out of its 500 inhabitants. In small villages petrol has been poured over houses and the people within have been burned alive. Rape is being encouraged by the Generals. Queipo de Llano, in calling upon the Moors to join up, offered them "beautiful women" as a special attraction.
>
> 'The Spanish people will win!' La Pasionaria cried, 'for they are fighting for an ideal; but while they have felt all along the sympathy of the French people they were deeply grieved to see that the Government of the French Republic – of the country of freedom and revolution – would not help the legitimate Government of Spain. Women of France, beware! It is Spain to-day, but it may be your turn to-morrow. Help us so that your men may give us arms. Heroism is not enough in this struggle against the aeroplanes and guns of the Fascist Rebels. We are defending liberty and peace; give us guns and aeroplanes for our struggle.'

Like one man the whole audience rose, crying 'Aeroplanes for Spain! Aeroplanes for Spain!'.

A minute's silence was then observed for the men killed by the Rebels. The band played the Spanish and French

anthems and the *Internationale*. It was announced that the workers of the Brandt armaments works near Paris had decided to send ten guns and 50,000 shells to the government forces – if only they could get them across.

La Pasionaria asked that the flowers that had been given to her be hung on the *Mur de Fédérés*, where the fighters of the Paris Commune were shot in 1871.

Later at night several buses coming from the meeting drove down the Grands Boulevards, and from these buses the people shouted 'Aeroplanes for Spain!'.

On the following evening, while the evening papers were being sold announcing in large headlines the fall of Irun, a demonstration of some 50,000 people in favour of the Spanish Republicans took place in the Place de la République, where in February 1934, six Communists were killed and two hundred were injured in street battles with the police during their protest demonstrations against the 'Fascist coup' of February 6.

The crowd carried flags and banners and, shouting 'Aeroplanes for Spain', marched past the statue of the Republic decorated with wreaths and the Spanish flag. The original plan was to hold this demonstration outside the Spanish Embassy, but this was prohibited by the government.

The banners displayed at the demonstration were all directed against the 'blockade'. 'DOWN WITH THE BLOCKADE', 'NON-INTERVENTION WAS THE CAUSE OF BADAJOZ', and so on. With clenched fists the men and women filed past the statue of the Republic, crying 'Aeroplanes for Spain!' and 'Down with the Fascist murderers.'

The Fall of Irun was felt by the French workers almost with a sense of personal tragedy. It all seemed so utterly unfair. If only, they reflected, the French Government had helped the defenders of Irun, Irun would not have fallen. It was two days later, on September 6, while, under the impression of Irun, the French working class was feeling more bitter against its government than ever before, that M. Blum made his famous speech at a Socialist gathering at the Luna Park. The speech was to become something of a turning-point in the attitude of the French people towards the Spanish Civil War.

It was a strange speech, and stranger still were the reactions of the audience. At the beginning, a large part of the audience – though mostly Socialist – was hostile to Blum, and several times the cry went up 'Aeroplanes for Spain!' 'Aeroplanes for Spain!' In the end, Blum received an ovation, and a great demonstration of loyalty and devotion.

How did he manage it?

For one thing, he represented it all as though it were a personal tragedy and he used the *vox humana* stop with greater effect than ever before. He had not changed in these last three months, he said – these three long months at the head of the government

> 'which seem longer to me than I don't know how many years. Not only have we achieved a great deal, but during these restless days and sleepless nights the march of time seems strangely slow. . . . You know I have not changed. Do you think that I do not share your feelings?'

It was a good beginning.

> 'The other night, at the Velodrome d'Hiver, you went to listen to the delegates of the Spanish Popular Front. I had seen them that very morning. Believe me, I listened to them with as much emotion as you did. (Cheers.) When I read in the papers about the fall of Irun and the agony of the last militiamen, do you think that my heart was not with them too?
>
> 'And do you think me suddenly incapable of reflection and foresight? Do you think I do not understand what it all means?
>
> 'Believe me, if I have acted as I have done, it is because I knew that it was necessary.'

It was in the national interests of France, Blum said, that the Republican Government of Spain should remain in power. With such a government the Pyrénées frontier of France, and her communications with North Africa were secure. With Spain under a military government, one could not be sure of anything.

> 'Whoever looks at it from the point of view of France's immediate interests cannot have the slightest doubt on the subject. And yet – horrible as it may sound – there is a certain Press in France which, blinded by class hatred, is capable of the worst crimes and treachery against its own country. . . . The Spanish Government is not only the legal Government of Spain, but it represents the will of the people. In international law, only this government is entitled to receive armaments from abroad.

'Yet there is nothing in international law that would prevent certain countries from "recognising" the Burgos Junta as the Government of Spain; and from that moment there is nothing in international law (which is not such firm and solid ground as you may imagine) which would prevent these countries from supplying armaments to the Rebels.

'What if this had been done? What could we have done in the circumstances except send an ultimatum and accept all its possible consequences?

'The most immediate consequence would have been a competition in the supply of armaments to both sides. And remember that there are countries where everything is concentrated in the hands of one man, and where the intensity of armaments production, and the industrial capacity is far greater than here. You can see what would have been the consequence to the whole of Europe of such competition on Spanish soil.

'I take entire responsibility for what the government has done. I hoped that our non-intervention proposal would save both Spain and Peace. On August 8 we decided to suspend all exports of armaments, to "the regular government of a friendly nation" – these were the very terms we used.'

Then came the famous 'moral example' argument:

'By giving this example, we hoped to pique the honour of the other Powers, and to prepare the way for the very rapid conclusion of a convention which seemed the only means of salvation.'

Pique the honour of Hitler and Mussolini!

'I know,' Blum continued, 'how bitterly our Spanish friends have judged our attitude. But, after all, we *did* believe that, in spite of the blatant inequality of treatment at the start, the Government of Spain with the people behind it, would ultimately recover what ground it had lost, and win in the end.'

Blum was now at the heart of the problem: 'Alas! during a long time, during a much much longer time than we had anticipated,' he said, '*we had, owing to our perhaps all-too-confident offer,* to remain with our hands tied, while the other Powers had still full political and juridical(?) freedom of action.

'It was this injustice, this inequality that made you suffer, as it made us suffer.

'And yet, think what would have happened if we had not made our offer of August 8. Think what would have been the consequences of an incident like the Kamerun incident!

Remember that one of the Rebel chiefs declared that, rather than suffer defeat, he would plunge Europe into war. Do you not think, that we have, after all, saved Europe from war at a particularly critical moment?'

Maybe; only how was Blum going to explain away the violations? His reply was a bold one.

> 'And what is the position to-day? As you know, all the Powers have subscribed to our proposal. *As far as I know, there is not a single proof, not a single piece of circumstantial evidence, to show that the agreement has been violated since it was subscribed to.* Having achieved this, can we go back on our word? I say No. We could do it only if we had solid proof that the agreement was not being observed.'

Then came a thrust at the Communists, who had been loudest in denouncing the Blum Government: the non-intervention agreement was signed by the Soviet Union; and it was no good saying that the policy of the government was contrary to the principles of the Front Populaire, or of any of its component parts.

If the Communists felt that way, they should say so openly.

'My friends, my friends,' M. Blum exclaimed, 'I am a Frenchman – for I am one – proud of France's history, and reared in her tradition. I shall leave no stone unturned to assure her security and her defence. But national honour also means to us the will for Peace! And to my last breath, I shall do everything to avert war for this country. I cannot accept the idea of preventive war even when some think war inevitable. War is possible only the moment it is admitted to be possible; *war is fatal from the moment it is declared to be fatal.*'

It all ended with a loud ovation.

The audience rose, singing the *Internationale*, and crying *'Vive Blum'*.

The speech had a curious effect on the French people. The clamour for 'Aeroplanes for Spain' subsided very noticeably. Blum had touched the most vulnerable spot in any Frenchman's heart – the fear of another war. There were some who asked in vain whether in the long run it did not pay to take risks, instead of evading such risks at *any* price. Blum very tactfully refrained from mentioning England in his speech; except that those 'in the know' realised what he meant when

he said: 'Do you think I exaggerate the danger of war? Listen to me. I must ask you to take my word for it; for I am a man who has never deceived you.'

There was one terribly weak point in his speech: and that was his assurance that Germany and Italy were observing the non-intervention agreement; for *that* was the principal justification of his policy; and it was a false justification. Several weeks later, Thorez, the Communist leader, attacked Blum severely for having, on that occasion, 'given Hitler and Mussolini a good character'.

The clamour for aeroplanes, as already said, subsided after Blum's speech. It is true that the C.G.T. called upon the government, only a few days later, to 'reconsider its policy in relation to Spain' but, it added, 'in agreement with the British and other democratic governments'. The Radical *Œuvre* remarked: 'Yes, "in agreement with the British and other democratic governments": isn't that the whole point?'

During the following weeks, the Socialist and Trade Union Internationals continued to pass more or less stern resolutions denouncing German and Italian violations of the agreement, and Mr. George Hicks, speaking in Paris on September 28, went so far as to say: 'If this illegal Fascist intervention is persisted in, if Portugal is to continue to be the base of Fascist banditry, then, *even at the risk of an international conflagration*, the international working class and the Socialist democracy of Europe must assume the offensive.'

But some days later, the Labour Party Conference at Edinburgh endorsed, however reluctantly, the non-intervention policy of the British Government. The delegates felt the injustice of it all very deeply but the block votes of the Trade Unions saved the Executive by 1,836,000 votes to 519,000.

And M. Delbos, at Bergerac, on September 13, said that if France decided not to send arms to the Spanish Government, it was because 'our friends' (i.e. England) would not have approved the opposite policy.

'When you are responsible for war and peace,' M. Delbos said, 'you have to be very careful. You must not give way to momentary impulses, but must think of the millions of human lives that might be lost as a result of an unwise decision.'

At the Radical Congress at Biarritz, he was warmly complimented for his 'firm Spanish policy'. M. Mistler, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber, spoke of the 'bloodlust' of all the Spaniards, and when a French volunteer, wearing the uniform of the Spanish militia appeared at the meeting (he was not perhaps quite genuine, but that wasn't the point), the Radical delegates were horrified, and avoided him like the plague; while M. Delbos told him not to come to the Congress again 'dressed up like that'.

The Right, naturally, behaved as might have been expected. Their papers published innumerable Red atrocity stories; Franco, in an interview with the *Echo de Paris,* said that he 'loved France'; that his little girl said her prayers in French; but that the Front Populaire was 'not France'; and the same paper raised a subscription for a 'sword of honour' to be presented to the heroes of the Alcazar.

But this loyalty to Fascism on the part of the French Right came eventually into conflict with their patriotism; and even before the subscription for the 'sword of honour' was closed, the *Echo* grew alarmed at the prospect of 'Spain becoming a German colony'. And M. de Kerillis tried to explain away this inconsistency with the absurd regret that 'France had not, in good time, taken the place, by Franco's side, now held by Germany'.[1]

[1] More about Spain in final chapter.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SUICIDE OF ROGER SALENGRO

'Les réactionnaires sont des méchantes gens.' – ANATOLE FRANCE.

AT 9 o'clock at night, on November 17, after a hard day's work, M. Roger Salengro, the Minister of the Interior of the Blum Government, and Socialist Mayor of Lille came home and, after writing a few short letters, sat down in an armchair in the kitchen and turned on the gas. The charwoman, who had gone away earlier in the evening, had left him his supper covered with a plate, but he did not touch it. It was she who found him dead at eight o'clock the next morning. The doctors who were called in, declared that he had been dead since eleven o'clock at night.

The first news that reached Paris was that Salengro had died of heart failure; but soon the truth came out. He had left a note for his brother:

> 'I am overworked, and the slander has gone too far. Slander and overwork and sorrow have defeated me. Love to mother and the family and yourself. I am joining Léonie.'

Léonie was his wife, who had died eighteen months earlier. He had since lived alone in his house at Lille. In his note to Blum he wrote:

> 'My wife died eighteen months ago, slandered and feeling the slander deeply.[1] My mother has not recovered from her operation and slander is eating into her. For my own part I have struggled bravely, but now I am finished. If they have not succeeded in dishonouring me, let them at least bear the responsibility for my death. I am neither a deserter nor a traitor. My party [the Socialist party] has been my life and my joy.
>
> 'My affection to my family, greetings to our comrades, and gratitude to you.'

[1] This was a reference to the attacks made on him and his wife by the local Communist Press.

There was also a note to M. Verlhomme, his secretary, and another to the charwoman, asking her to forgive him the shock he was going to cause her.

Slander, slander, slander: it was the ever-recurring theme in these short, disjointed notes. Slander had driven the distracted man to suicide. The last months of his life had been a continuous agony.

Salengro was a man of great personal simplicity. With his round face and turned-up nose, and broad grin, he looked like a big boy, except that he was nearly bald, with funny little tufts of fair curly hair carefully parted in the middle. He was a hard worker, and able administrator, and, as Minister of the Interior – an office he took when the great strikes were in full swing – he handled the situation with skill and tact and 'settled (as Blum said) the greatest social upheaval in France's recent history without the loss of a single drop of blood'.

He was, together with Blum, the man who deserves the greatest credit for the Matignon Agreement. At the same time, he suffered from a certain shyness; he was not a good parliamentary debater; and was apt to fall into traps set by more wily and more experienced parliamentarians, as he did, for instance, when, driven into a tight corner at the Senate one day, he committed the government to a new policy in relation to stay-in strikes.[1]

Even so, here was a minister holding one of the most arduous and responsible posts in the government, and one who was doing his work with notable skill and ability. When the Blum Government was formed he was rightly regarded as one of the three or four 'best heads' in it. And yet this man was driven to suicide.

A campaign was started against him in *Gringoire* – *'la feuille infâme'*, as Blum was to call it – about the beginning of August. This campaign consisted in showing that Salengro, who served as a dispatch-rider during the War, had deserted to the enemy on April 7, 1915. Apart from producing the 'evidence' of six ex-soldiers who claimed to have witnessed this 'shameful scene' (though none of them, oddly enough, had figured as a witness at Salengro's trial), *Gringoire* also alleged that *le cycliste* had been sentenced to death by a court martial, and that the

[1] See page 337.

'second' court martial which acquitted him *in absentia* in 1916 had been 'arranged' by Salengro's political friends.

The absence of any record of this first court martial was attributed by *Gringoire* to the 'fact' that the records had been tampered with. The campaign was taken up by several other papers of the Right.

At first Salengro ignored these attacks – and his silence was interpreted by *Gringoire* as new evidence of his guilt – but, as the campaign increased in violence, the government was obliged to intervene. General Gamelin, the head of the French Army, and two representatives of the most important ex-servicemen's organisations were asked to inquire into the case, and they reported that there was no evidence of Salengro having been sentenced to death for desertion. Actually, he was sentenced only once – and that was by a German court, which condemned him to two years' imprisonment for insubordination and for his refusal to 'work against France' in a German munition factory. The evidence produced by his French fellow-prisoners showed that he had displayed great personal courage in defying the Germans. For all that, the *feuille infâme* continued its campaign.

On Armistice Day it published an abominable cartoon by Roger Roy showing the Unknown Soldier rising from his grave and pointing an avenging finger at Salengro as he stood among the other Ministers at the Armistice ceremony – *'Pas lui!'*

The Chamber took up the 'Salengro case' on November 13, and, with the exception of sixty pro-Fascists (including several friends of Chiappe), it again 'acquitted' Salengro. M. Petsche, a Member of the Right Centre, had the courage to say that, while he could not vote for the government, he openly condemned 'such abominable Press campaigns'. When the vote was taken, Salengro's friends crowded round him, cheering him and patting him on the back. He smiled sadly – like a man who no longer cared. And, five days later, he committed suicide. The slanderous campaign had broken him.

A friend of mine who dined with him a few days before his death, said that he was silent all the time, and that towards the end of the dinner he broke down and wept hysterically. Such is the moral agony that a paper like *Gringoire* can inflict, for political reasons of its own, on a man whose nerves are not

made of steel. For Salengro was heavily overworked; he was not in good health, and he still deeply felt the loss of his wife. He was a lonely man.

Though Salengro's case was the most tragic of all, he was not the first victim of such slander. With a certain class of the French Press, and particularly with *Gringoire*, slander had become, especially since 1934, a recognised political weapon. The *Action Française* was the first to start the fashion; but its fantastic stories, long before 1934, of how Barthou used to go in for flagellation, and of how Briand had started his career as a *maquereau*, were treated as a joke. But after the Sixth of February such stories ceased to be a joke, especially as the men who fabricated these stories had now fully recognised their political value. For the Sixth of February itself had largely been prepared by some highly mischievous stories in connection with the Stavisky case (for instance, Léon Daudet's story that Stavisky had been murdered on the instructions of Chautemps, the Premier).

Since 1934 *Gringoire* specialised in slander as a political weapon more than any other paper. This paper, which had started its career as an ordinary gossip weekly, with a great deal of magazine matter, had developed, since 1934, into an important organ of 'public opinion' with a circulation of over half a million. For there is a section of 'public opinion' in France which is extremely gullible, and likes nothing better than dirt about public men. There was a Sixth of February public which was prepared to swallow the most abominable stories about any man of the Left – the more abominable the better. *Gringoire* was owned by the Carbuccia gang – and 'gang' is the only right word. Carbuccia is the son-in-law of Chiappe, the notorious ex-prefect of the Paris police; and Chiappe is the man behind this 'journalism'. Henri Béraud – the author of the famous 'Reduce England to Slavery' – is the obedient tool in the hands of these people.

The campaigns of *Gringoire* are notorious. M. Lebrun, the President of the Republic, who, after the Sixth of February, had opposed the reinstatement of Chiappe at the head of the Paris police – a reinstatement proposed by Tardieu (who has since chosen *Gringoire* as the mouthpiece for his anti-parliamentary propaganda) was its first victim. Henri Béraud wrote

article after article attacking the President and representing him as a half-wit in a state of senile decay. Then came the famous campaign against Chautemps and Pressard, his brother-in-law, who were accused of having engineered the murder of Prince. For months afterwards, Chautemps, for fear of being lynched, could not appear in any public place, and Pressard died a nervous wreck a few months later.

Henri Chéron, who died a broken man after another savage Press campaign, may also be regarded as a victim of slander. Next came Herriot, who was accused of patronising a Soviet spy – of whom he had never even heard until then. He could have afforded to ignore this campaign even more than the others; but it affected him deeply, none the less, and his disgust with Laval, who had done nothing to stop the attacks, was one of the contributory causes of the break-up of the Laval Government. During my meeting with Herriot in April, which I described above, Herriot still felt very strongly about the 'calumny'. And then came the campaign against Salengro. When this ended in Salengro's suicide, even the most gullible readers of the *feuille infâme* must have realised that the joke had gone too far. For one thing, even if one assumed that in the middle of no-man's-land, Salengro lost his nerve (and the assumption is a purely hypothetical one), was it for Chiappe and other men, who had safely stayed behind in Paris and Bordeaux, to throw stones at him?

The purpose of these campaigns was only too clear. Why criticise the policy of a government, or even the principles of a régime, when it is so much easier to call its representatives murderers or deserters? In the eyes of the gullible reader such campaigns throw much greater discredit on the government, and, in the last resort, on a democratic Republic itself than any political discourses, however violent, about the virtues of dictatorship or the weaknesses of democracy. Everybody remembers that Salengro was a 'deserter'; who remembers any of the pro-Fascist arguments used in the same paper by M. Tardieu? Such is the 'technique' of the anti-parliamentary propaganda of the Chiappe gang. That it serves no 'moral' purpose, but only a political purpose may be clearly observed from the fact that M. Chautemps, who was treated as a murderer for months, began to be treated with great politeness

by the pro-Fascist Press as soon as the campaign against him no longer served any purpose, and as soon as he began to be regarded as a potential opponent of M. Blum.

Papers like *Gringoire, Candide, Le Jour,* and a few others, have done more than anything else to stir up hatred in France, and to keep France divided, as far as possible, into two camps. A well-known journalist of Left-Wing sympathies said to me a few days before Salengro's death: 'In the past I used to lunch and dine with all sorts of people. Now I can be on friendly terms only with people who have more or less the same political convictions as I have. With the others one is scarcely on speaking terms.'

It may be argued that the Press of the Left has not always been fair to its opponents either. This is true in a sense. It has pulled Laval's leg about his 'sixty millions', it has pulled Tardieu's leg about the N'goka Sangha case; but it has never been either as persistent or as sadistic in its 'persecutions' as are the pro-Fascist papers. Nor has it ever (with the possible exception of the Communist Press in the past) specialised in manufacturing 'revelations'. And of sheer sadism even the *Humanité* was never guilty.

Anatole France was right: *'Les réactionnaires sont des méchantes gens.'* And the *méchanceté* of the pro-Fascist Press has, in actual practice, been a much more disturbing psychological factor in France than the existence of the Croix de Feu.

The Press Bill that the Blum Government introduced at the Chamber a week after Salengro's death filled a long-needed want. Until then there had been no adequate law in France to protect a man against libel. The jurisdiction of the *Cour d'Assises,* with its unwieldy and costly machinery was, in cases of libel, 'largely theoretical', as the preamble to the Blum Bill said. The substance of the Bill is the *correctionalisation* of libel actions. Under the new system libel actions go before the *Correctionnelle,* that is, a Court without a Jury, and one endowed with a rapid procedure. Critics of the Bill have observed that the elimination of the jury is an undemocratic measure; and this is true in a sense – though, as past experience has shown, French juries can be extremely unreliable in a libel action of a political or semi-political nature.

The case of Police-Inspector Bony, who lost his libel action

against *Gringoire*, which had called him a murderer without the slightest evidence, is a good example of what French juries are capable of. The jury happened to dislike Bony, and also allowed itself to be impressed by a comic witness for the defence – a Mlle Cotillon – who claimed to have been blackmailed by Bony ten years earlier. The allegation was totally irrelevant to the case, but nevertheless *Gringoire* was acquitted.

Even so, the objection to the abolition of the jury holds good in principle, especially if one assumes that the *Correctionnelle* judges may some day become the obedient tools in the hands of a reactionary government ready to stifle the Press.

Under the new Bill the plaintiff may also appeal to the Correctional Court for damages, even after the defendant has been acquitted on the criminal charge of libel – that is, even if the defamatory statement is true in fact. This innovation would bring the French law dangerously near to the British law with its system of damages, even in cases where the 'damage' done is little short of imaginary. It is to be hoped that when the Bill becomes law it will not lay the foundations for a source of unscrupulous profiteering – the kind of thing that has already existed quite long enough in England. The clause in the Blum Bill making the publication of 'false news that is liable to disturb public peace or international relations' a criminal offence, 'provided this publication was carried out with the knowledge that this news is false' has also been the subject of much criticism. On the other hand the clauses obliging newspapers to show to whom they belong and to declare any money received from abroad – an important measure when one remembers the Italian subsidies of 1935 – are more than justifiable.[1] Only, is the clause concerning foreign subsidies also practicable? How can the money be traced? There is the well-known case of a distinguished 'diplomatic correspondent' of a certain Paris paper, who was dismissed after his refusal to share the spoils with the proprietor.

In spite of these criticisms of the Press Bill of the Blum Government, there is no doubt that there is room for numerous Press reforms, and particularly for the stiffening of the libel law.

[1] See Front Populaire programme, Chapter XIV.

In a way, it is a pity that the freedom of the French Press should have to be restricted. But it is the fault of papers like *Gringoire,* which have become a real public menace. As Herriot said in his memorial speech in honour of Salengro: 'Freedom means responsibility.' But Fascists like Chiappe do not know what responsibility means, and they have no respect for freedom, except when it allows them to slander their political opponents with impunity.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE EVE OF 1937

DURING the last months of 1936, both international affairs and, to some extent, the French internal situation were dominated by the Spanish Civil War. Non-intervention was, obviously, not working satisfactorily, and even if, as Blum claimed, the non-intervention proposal saved Europe from war in August, and created a certain *détente* in September and October, things went from bad to worse during November and December.

In November, in spite of Franco's failure to capture Madrid, his government was recognised by Germany and Italy as the Government of Spain. This meant that the two Fascist powers had committed themselves to supporting him by every possible means. If Madrid was saved in November, it was largely thanks to the armaments the Spanish Government had received from Soviet Russia (her retort to the enormous and almost open support given by Germany and Italy to the Rebels), and to the fighting qualities of the International Column. Germany and Italy realised that, with Russia helping the government, the Rebels would be beaten. However many aeroplanes and tanks they might get from Germany and Italy, they could not defeat the (now) well-equipped and far more numerous government forces. Only by increasing his manpower could Italy and Germany now save Franco.

The dispatch of German and Italian expeditionary forces became inevitable. Early in December, as was to be expected, 6,000 German soldiers landed at Cadiz to reinforce the German troops who had already been with the Rebels since October; and to take the place of the legionaries, most of whom had been killed or wounded.

The civil war was now clearly threatening to become an international war. The situation, as Blum said on November 27, was now more dangerous than it had ever been. On

December 4, France and Britain proposed that all intervention be stopped; and that this non-intervention be extended to 'volunteers'. The 'totalitarian volunteers' (as Mr. Noel Baker ironically called them in the House of Commons) presented the most serious problem of all; for, as distinct from the few thousand French and other 'democratic' volunteers, who had gone to Spain on their own initiative, the German and Italian 'volunteers' could obviously not have gone there except at the behest of their respective governments. The Franco-British proposal for the extension of non-intervention to volunteers, as well as the proposal to mediate an armistice met with no satisfactory response from the Fascist powers – their replies were tactical, rather than practical, and took six weeks to come.

The situation in Spain on the eve of 1937 was full of the most dangerous possibilities. Majorca was virtually under Italian occupation; German warships were active along the Spanish coast; and the conclusion of the Anglo-Italian 'gentlemen's agreement' coincided with the landing at Cadiz of 5,000 Italian 'volunteers'. In the most 'ungentlemanly' spirit Mussolini's spokesmen in Paris insinuated to anyone who cared to listen that the troops had been landed in Spain with the secret approval of England, who did not like Franco to be 'run' by Germans only. A member of the French Government said to me that day: *'Avec votre gentlemen's agreement vous êtes aussi cocus que nous l'étions sous Laval!'* And, in the meantime, the Germans were beginning to penetrate into Spanish Morocco, threatening to revive on a grand scale the old Moroccan problem. It was not until the second half of January, when German troops were expected to land in Morocco that French public opinion rose like one man, and said 'Stop' to Germany, intimating clearly that if Germany persisted in her design, French troops would, with the Sultan's authority, occupy the Spanish Zone. Hitler was startled by this unanimity in a 'hopelessly divided' nation, and retreated.

While in the foreign debate of December 4 and 5 the Blum Government persisted in defending their non-intervention policy (for any other policy, they said, would only lead to the isolation of France), Blum already then defined the limits

beyond which France – presumably in agreement with Britain – would not allow the Fascist Powers to go – limits to which Delbos had referred during the previous week. France, he said in substance, would not allow French shipping to be interfered with (did this mean that she would in no circumstances allow a blockade of Catalonia, which the Rebels could carry out effectively only with direct German and Italian help?); she would not allow the Balearics to be occupied by Italy, and she would not allow 'countries under our protection' (that is, Morocco) to be disintegrated. The reference to Morocco was a particularly pointed one. (Later in December, Delbos also warned the German Ambassador that France would not readily tolerate the presence in Spain of a regular German army which would be a menace to France's Southern frontier.)

The Communist proposal that the embargo against the Spanish Government be raised was rejected by Blum; for he thought that the raising of the embargo would inevitably develop into direct intervention.

For the first time since the formation of the Front Populaire Government, the Communists abstained from voting on the motion of confidence. Immediately after the vote, Blum called his Ministers together; but decided in the end not to resign, 'as such a resignation in the present grave situation would be misunderstood both at home and abroad'. The Communists thereupon published a statement in which they said that although they disagreed with the government's Spanish policy, they would support it loyally in all other matters. And they added that 'the Front Populaire continued'. This patched up the quarrel for the time being.

Since July, Spain had been the principal source of conflict within the Front Populaire, between the Communists on the one hand, and the Radicals and Socialists on the other. Blum himself had friendly feelings for the Spanish Government; but, under the influence of Britain and of his Radical colleagues – particularly of M. Delbos – he clung to the non-intervention policy. The Radicals, with a few rare exceptions, were uncompromisingly non-interventionist.

After four months of Front Populaire Government, the Radical rank-and-file were beginning to distrust the Communists

almost as much as they had distrusted the Fascists in the past. They held the Communists responsible for the stay-in strikes, and other 'violations of the laws of property'. They felt that, under the pressure of the June strikes, legislation had been enacted which would be ruinous to the small manufacturer and trader. I remember an old-fashioned Radical from Toulouse at the Biarritz Congress in October who spoke of the *grande peur des classes moyennes,* and who was horrified by a Red procession he had seen in the streets of his native town, 'with the Red flag flying on the Capitol of Toulouse'. He had no sympathy whatsoever for the Spanish Republicans, and firmly believed (and was not this belief shared by M. Delbos, the Foreign Minister himself?) that the French Communists were trying to drag France into war with Germany over Spain. He also spoke with deep indignation of the Communists' deliberate attempt to provoke Germany when, in September, they were proposing to hold 122 Communist meetings in Alsace-Lorraine. Aware of the danger, the government had fortunately limited the meetings to ten – which, the Radicals felt, 'was more than enough'. Even so, Hitler sent in a protest against Thorèz's 'offensive' speech at Strasbourg.

The relations between the Socialists and the Communists were little better. At public meetings the Communists strongly criticised Blum; and their slogan *'Blum à l'Action!'* with which he was welcomed at a joint Front Populaire meeting in November was scarcely a friendly one. As for the Radical leaders who attended the meeting, they were simply booed by the Communists in the audience. In short, after six months of Front Populaire Government the relations between the government parties and their Communist 'allies' were not altogether friendly; though, nominally, the Front Populaire continued, even after the Communist abstention in the foreign debate on December 5.

Blum found the attitude of the Communists greatly annoying. With their slogan *'Blum à l'Action!'* they were trying to show that they were the only 'dynamic' party in the Front Populaire, and they were hoping to preserve their 'dynamic' reputation among the working class.

A large part of the working class remained faithful to them;

but it is probably true that if an election had been held at the end of 1936, the Communists would have suffered a severe setback. The *petite bourgeoisie* who, in May, had come to regard them as a new variety of Jacobins, had now come to distrust them. They seemed to be an element of disorder; and many people refused any longer to take their patriotic and democratic slogans at their face value. It cannot be denied that the execution of Kamenev and Zinoviev caused the Communists a great deal of harm in the eyes of the French middle class, and especially among those Left-Wing intellectuals who liked to think of Russia as 'the great Democracy of the East'.

André Gide's little book *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* in which he dwelt on the mental slavery and slavishness of the Russian people under the Stalin régime, on the lack of revolutionary idealism, and on the smugness of the new Soviet bourgeoisie struck another blow at the illusion entertained for a long time by many French Left-Wing intellectuals. The conversion to Communism of André Gide, one of France's greatest living writers, a few years earlier had, indeed, been an invaluable asset to the Communists; and Gide's bitter pamphlet – though dealing with Russia and not with France – tended to convince many Frenchmen that the concern felt by the French Communists for freedom and democracy was sheer humbug. This was not quite fair; for no one could deny that the Communists had rendered the Republic a great service by the part they had played in building up the anti-Fascist Front – but even so, their sincerity was no longer as apparent as it had been in May; – and their troublesome attitude to the Blum Government since July tended in the eyes of many of their former supporters to confirm this unpleasant impression.

The keystone of France's foreign policy since the formation of the Blum Government was 'co-operation with England'. This mattered to Blum more than anything else. In spite of Belgium's 'neutrality declaration' earlier in the autumn, there was virtually in existence, at the end of 1936, a defensive alliance between France, Great Britain and Belgium. Mr. Eden had guaranteed France and Belgium against unprovoked aggression, and M. Delbos, on December 4, solemnly declared that Britain and Belgium could count on the immediate

assistance of all France's armed forces. To reassure England, and, possibly to warn Italy and Germany who had, just then, recognised the Franco Government, Blum made a strange speech at the Vélodrome d'Hiver on November 27, in which he declared the French army to be the strongest in Europe, with the exception of the Russian army; and also spoke highly of the French navy and air force, which, he said, was second to none. A strange boast for the most determined advocate of disarmament to make![1]

But the international situation had become such that any other language on the part of the French Prime Minister would have been misunderstood: it was important to impress upon Germany that France could still look after herself, and that she was not in a state of anarchy and decay, as only too many Germans seemed to imagine.

It is a strange irony that it should have fallen to Blum's lot to decide, in reply to Germany's new conscription decree doubling the term of military service, on the largest armaments programme France had ever seen. The military expenditure for 1937 is, indeed, over fifty per cent higher than in 1936, the total army estimates amounting to 11,046 million francs, or 4,084 millions more than in 1936. The total air estimates for 1937 are 3,700 million francs, or 1,300 millions more than in the previous year.

Thanks to the strengthening of the French army, to the Maginot Line, to the rearmament programme of Great Britain, and to the defensive Anglo-French alliance, Western Europe seemed, at the end of 1936, reasonably safe against aggression; – in spite of a tendency existing in certain military quarters in Germany to regard a surprise attack on France – an attack which would break through the Maginot Line overnight – as the shortest cut to victory. It is also worth noting that, owing to the 'cannons rather than butter' policy of the Hitler régime – a policy which has resulted in great hardship and privation among the German people – much of their nervous energy, which was intact in 1914, has already been wasted; and Germany is therefore fit to fight only a short, but not a long war.

[1] On December 17 M. Daladier admitted that the standing army of France was only half the size of the German army.

But in spite of the advantages that Germany would gain from a quick victory in the West, it is still possible that the risks of such an attack would be too great; and that she might prefer to move eastward – to begin with.

If that happens, France will be in a difficult dilemma. Czechoslovakia and Poland are her allies; – and what will she do if Germany attacks either of them? Poland is a large country; and during Ridz-Smigly's visit to Paris in September the bonds between France and Poland were strengthened; among other things, Poland secured a loan of twenty million pounds for armaments. Whether France and Poland would assist each other in case of German aggression is one of the great questions in Europe to-day – and it is a question that keeps Germany guessing.

But Czechoslovakia? A German attack on that country would be a fairly easy matter; and if France intervened alone, she would be faced with the bulk of the German forces. Moreover, any intervention in Germany since the remilitarisation of the Rhineland would, in any case, be a difficult matter. When you ask a Frenchman nowadays what France would do if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, the answer is usually an evasive one: 'it would all depend –' What this means is that it would depend first, on what England would do, and secondly, on what Russia would do. This is a typical example of France's foreign policy to-day.

With the League in ruins, and collective security an unrealised hope, it is scarcely surprising that France should feel obliged to be opportunist in her foreign policy to some extent – as far as Eastern Europe is concerned. Her policy is, in principle, a 'League Policy'; in practice, it must adapt itself to the circumstances of the moment, and take into account the absence of a collective system of security. That is largely why France under the Front Populaire Government, has been reluctant to enter into any automatic commitments with the Soviet Union. The pact remains in existence; but there is no formal military alliance; and Blum has even refrained from encouraging staff talks with the leaders of the Red army. It is also curious how in his speech on December 4 Delbos should have referred only in the vaguest terms to the Little Entente: 'We have strengthened our bonds with the Little

Entente, and we hope to strengthen them still further'; – which was not saying much really.

An article in the *Europe Nouvelle* at the end of 1936 defined France's position in Europe as follows: 'She is not powerful enough to exercise hegemony over Europe [it is not like the Eighteenth Century when she was the largest and most highly organised European nation]; but, at the same time, she *cannot afford* to allow any other nation to dominate Europe.' In other words, she *cannot afford* to allow Germany to dominate the whole of Central or Eastern Europe; for if she did, there would be, to use the familiar phrase 'after Sadowa, Sedan'.

The great question is: will she have the diplomatic skill to prevent it? For God is not always on the side of the biggest guns; He is sometimes also on the side of the better brains. And even if France's foreign policy in the last few years has been marked by the most terrible blunders and failures, the Blum Government's determination to restore Anglo-French co-operation, and to court the friendship of the United States to the extent of re-examining the whole question of war debts was dictated by a sound instinct. The mere fact that the three great democracies *may* be drawn together in opposition to such combinations as the German-Japanese pact has had a discouraging effect on the Powers most likely to provoke another world war.

Compared with the great commotions of 1934 and the upheaval of June 1936 France was, internally, in a remarkably stable position at the end of 1936. There was, no doubt, a certain *bien pensant* – or 'Sixth of February' – public in the West End of Paris which never ceased its lamentations about France 'going to the dogs, just like Spain, under that awful Blum'; and there are many old ladies and old gentlemen, and some young readers of *Gringoire* who would gladly see all the 'Reds' of France massacred overnight. But such plans do not go beyond day-dreaming. For in reality the country is not as disunited as it might appear from the Press or from casual West-end lamentations.

There are no real technical possibilities for a civil war in France – for, as distinct from Spain, the French army is essentially non-political. And even if there were such technical

possibilities, as well as a suitable psychological atmosphere, (which is less likely than it has been for years) both the Left and the Right would still be restrained by the thought that civil war in France would put her at the mercy of Germany.

After all, even so bitter an enemy of the Blum Government as M. de Kerillis declared in the foreign debate on December 5 that, whatever happened, France would be a united nation the day war broke out. And even the mere threat to French interests in Morocco created National Unity in France in one day. It was enormously impressive.

Actually, the Front Populaire régime had not affected adversely the private lives of even its grimmest enemies. The *bien pensant* public continues to go to tea parties and concerts and theatres; – more, indeed, under Blum than it did during the five previous years.

There are difficulties in the way: the stay-in strikes never ceased completely; and the general introduction of the forty-hour week threatened, at the end of 1936, to send up the cost of living still further – with the prospect of more labour disputes. The money that the French Treasury will have to borrow in 1937 is estimated at about thirty milliard francs – not an amount easily to be found. But on the whole, Paris and France were not, internally, nearly as pessimistic as they had been during the four previous years. Business was picking up, in spite of the 'sabotage' on the part of certain employers. The orders at the Paris Motor Show of October 1936 had exceeded those of 1935 by seventy per cent, the railway and revenue returns (despite the heavy initial budget deficit) were improving; money was flowing more freely; the bank-rate was low; and the huge traffic jams in the centre of Paris – the like of which had not been seen in the five previous years – were a welcome sign of a business and shopping *reprise*. Things were not going too badly. There might be a change of government; possibly even a change accompanied by some disorders; but the prospect of a change of régime was more remote than ever. Fascism counted for little; and, having tasted of the fruits of Fascism in 1934–5 and of Left extremism in June 1936, France was steadily regaining her equilibrium – the equilibrium of a great Democratic Republic.

Only beyond the Rhine, at Berchtesgaden, Herr Hitler was planning new surprises.

And beyond the Pyrénées there was Spain. German troops were besieging Madrid, and people of various nationalities were already killing each other.

INDEX

OF PROPER NAMES

(A detailed synopsis of contents is given at the beginning of the book)

INDEX

Abetz, Herr, 104
Abyssinia, Emperor of, 176
Alexander, King, of Jugoslavia, 82, 98
Aloisi, Count, 135
Angell, Norman, 190
Archimbaud, M., 130
Arnault, M., 184
Atholl, Duchess of, 229
Aubaud, M., 290
Auriol, Vincent, 41, 156, 161, 290, 328-30, 332-4, 336 & 338 *footnotes*
Aymard, of *Liberté*, 49

Bainville, Jacques, 15, 19, 281
Baker, Philip Noel, 190, 400
Baldwin, Stanley, 27, 104, 180
Bardoux, Jacques, 306
Barthou, M., 64, 78, 82, 83, 98, 99, 100, 103-4, 123, 132, 394
Bartlett, Vernon, 76
Bastid, M., 290
Beck, 99
Bedouce, M., 290
Belin, M., 335, 336, 383
Benda, Julien, 62
Benes, Dr., 27
Béraud, Henri, 176, 177 *and footnote*, 394
Bergery, M., 42, 72, 341
Berry, Sir Gomer, 93
Blum, Léon, 35-6, 40-1, 43-5, 59, 65, 80, 84-6 *and footnote*, 92, 126, 130-2, 154-6, 161-3, 186-7, 190-2, 197, 199 *and footnote*, 202, 204, 211, 245, 263 *footnote*, 275-91, 293, 299-300, 304-5, 309, 315-9, 328-31, 333-4, 337, 360, 371, 373-5, 377-8, 385-8, 392, 399, 400-7
Blancho, M., 290
Bonnefoy-Sibour, M., 54
Bonnevay, M., 155
Bony, Police-Inspector, 396, 397
Bouisson, M., 145-50
Bracke, M., 156, 157
Braun, Max, 111, 115, 117, 119, 120
Bred, Pavel, 40
Briand, Aristide, 23, 26, 27, 28, 30-5
Brind, Major-General, 104
Brüning, 35, 37
Brunschwicg, Mme, 290, 315
Bucard, M., 194
Bürckel, Herr, 109-12, 115

Cachin, Marcel, 21, 286
Caillaux, Joseph, 17, 26, 27, 145-50, 158, 331, 337
Carbuccia, 394
Cavaignac, General, 341
Cecil, Lord, 202
Chamberlain, Sir Austen, 27
Chamberlain, Neville, 137, 334
Chambrun, M. de, 170
Chautemps, M., 45, 46, 48, 49, 67, 68, 69, 182, 188, 289, 395
Chéron, Henri, 29, 38, 64, 69, 83, 184, 395
Chiappe, M., 49, 50 *and footnote*, 51 *and footnote*, 53, 70, 394, 395, 398
Chopine, Paul, 184
Chauffet, M., 346
Churchill, Winston, 229
Ciano, Count, 135
Citrine, Sir Walter, 229
Clair, René, 167
Claudel, Paul, 189
Clemenceau, Georges, 21-4, 32, 220, 221, 278
Clerk, Sir George, 176, 379
Cole, G. D. H., 43
Collins, Inspector, 69
Costes, M., 312
Cot, Pierre, 41, 167, 191, 202, 217, 290, 347-50
Cotillon, Mlle, 397
Couturier, Vaillant, 283

d'Abernon, Lord, 27
Dahlet, M., 265
Daladier, M., 42, 44-7, 50 *and footnote*, 51-4, 59, 60, 129, 149, 150, 155, 161-4, 167, 188, 209, 245, 282, 289, 346, 404 *footnote*
Dalimier, M., 48
Daudet, Léon, 65, 69, 151, 189, 394
Déat, Marcel, 43, 143, 144, 194, 211, 271, 272, 280
Delaisi, Francis, 341
Delbos, Yvon, 161, 204, 205, 211, 290, 315, 371-7, 379-80, 389, 401-3
Denain, General, 65, 91, 95
Déplat, Martinaud, 272
Derby, Lord, prime minister, 82

Deschanel, Paul, 22, 23
Dezarnaulds, M., 290
Dominique, Pierre, 366
Dorgères, M., 182, 183
Doriot, Jacques, 196, 215, 354, 359, 364-9
Dormoy, M., 248 *and footnote*, 249, 250, 251, 289
Doumer, Paul, 33, 40
Doumergue, Gaston, 17, 28, 47, 58, 63-8, 70, 74-93, 159-60, 245, 329
Doumergue, Mme, 90
Dubarry, of *Volonté*, 49
Duboin, Jacques, 243
Duclos, M., 363

Eden, Anthony, 104, 133, 134, 171-3, 176, 205, 206, 208, 228, 229, 403
Edward VIII, 240 *footnote*

Fabre, Capt., 55
Fabre, M., director of the *Comédie Française*, 51
Faure, Paul, 41, 190, 289, 364
Ferry, Desiré, 267, 268, 270 *and footnote*, 274
Février, M., 254
Flandin, Pierre, 39 *footnote*, 64, 93-7, 126, 128, 130, 135, 136, 142-5, 150, 155, 177, 211, 212, 217, 226, 227, 272, 275, 341, 343, 344, 380
Foch, Marshal, 24, 220
Franco, General, 381, 399, 403
François I, 215
Franklin-Bouillon, 31, 35,
Frossard, M., 59
Frot, M., 60, 282

Gambetta, Léon, 341
Gamelin, General, 226, 393
Gardey, M., 321
Gasnier-Duparc, M., 290
Gentizon, M., of the *Temps*, 176
George V, 209
Gide, André, 403
Gillie, Darsie R., 277 *and footnote*
Goebbels, Dr., 71, 112
Goering, 113, 169, 227 *footnote*
Gorguloff, 40
Goy, Jean, 89, 104, 159
Grandi, Signor, 36
Greiser, Captain, 373
Guernut, M., 87, 167, 188, 211

Habert, Marcel, 101
Halluin, Vicomte d', *see* Dorgères
Hassel, Herr von, 171
Henderson, Arthur, 134
Henriot, Philippe, 49, 214
Herr, Lucien, 276, 277
Herriot, Edouard, 18, 25-8, 40-3, 58, 63, 65, 71, 86-8 91, 93, 95, 101, 103, 145, 147, 161, 164, 165, 187, 188, 191, 192, 202, 203, 208, 216 *and footnote*, 253-9 *and footnote*, 315, 370, 373, 395, 398
Hicks, George, 389
Hindenburg, Field-Marshal von, 33,
Hitler, Adolf, 31, 35, 36, 42, 73, 79, 102-4, 107, 111, 112, 118, 129, 131-4, 138, 140, 160, 172, 177, 201, 205, 208, 217-9, 223, 224, 226-30, 238, 244, 259, 263, 272, 309, 366, 373, 377-9, 383, 387, 400, 402, 407
Hoare, Sir Samuel, 175-7, 179, 180, 190, 201, 203-6, 376
Hodza, Dr., 212
Hoffman, Herr, 111, 120
Hoover, President, 33-4
Hordis, M., 242, 243, 246
Hüber, Herr, 262, 263 *footnote*, 266 *footnote*

Jardillier, M., 290
Jaurès, 247, 277, 278, 280, 281, 382
Jennings, Ivor, 81
Jenny, M., 345
Joliot-Curie, Mme, 290, 315
Jouhaux, M., 190, 284, 300, 303, 318, 320, 321, 323, 331, 360
Jouvenel, Bertrand de, 105, 124, 217-9, 366, 367
Jouvenel, Henry de, 217

Kamenev, 403
Kerillis, Henri de, 89-91, 140, 174, 187 199, 200, 213, 231, 232, 352, 390, 406
Kerr, Philip, 220
Klotz, M., 23
Knittel, Jean, 260 261
Kun, Bela, 272

Lacore, Mme ,290, 315
Lagrange, M., 290, 326, 327 *footnote*
Lamourette, L'Abbé, 198
Lamoureux, M., 253
Lapie, M., 268, 269, 270 *footnote*
Lasteyrie, M. de, 214
Laurent, Fernand, 214
Laval, Pierre, 16, 17, 28, 32-5, 38, 39, 65, 83, 98-105, 111, 121, 122 *and footnote*, 123-6, 128, 131 *footnote*, 132, 135, 136, 139, 140, 149, 150, 154, 158-62, 166, 168-73, 177-82, 187-98, 199, 201-11, 213, 225, 227, 253, 272, 365, 370, 395, 396
Lebas, M., 290
Lebecq, M., 155
Lebrun, Albert, 58, 67, 90, 161, 263 *footnote*, 394

Lémery, M., 83
Lescouvé, M., 69
Llano, Gen. Queipo de, 375
Lloyd George, David, 21, 25, 220, 222
Lothian, Lord, *see* Kerr, Philip
Lyautey, M., 290
Lyautey, Marshal, 57, 58

MacDonald, Ramsay, 82, 128, 135-8
MacMahon, Marshal, 63, 86 *and footnote*
Maes, M., 241
Maginot, 226
Malraux, André, 191
Mandel, M., 95, 147, 187, 272
Mangin, General, 117
Marchand, M., 55
Marchandeau, M., 83
Marin, Louis, 31, 35, 65, 95, 267, 268, 270 *footnote*
Marion, Paul, 366
Maritain, Jacques, 189
Marquet, M., 43, 65, 280
Martin, Bienvenu, 84, 337
Martin, Germain, 64, 95, 143-5, 330
Marty, M., 383
Mathis, Albert, 265
Maud'huy, Bertrand de, 196, 201, 367
Mauriac, François, 100, 189
Maurin, General, 95
Maurras, Charles, 183, 200, 281 *and footnote*, 282
Mercier, M., 331
Mermoz, 361 *and footnote*
Millerand, Alexandre, 22, 23, 40, 66, 278
Milner, Lord, 66
Mistler, M., 390
Mola, General, 376
Moltke, Field-Marshal von, 220
Monnet, Georges, 281, 290, 340
Montagnon, M., 104, 225
Moret, M., 97
Mourer, Herr, 262, 263 *and footnote*
Moutet, Marius, 290
Mussolini, Benito, 100, 124-6, 134-7, 160, 169-71, 173-6, 178, 188, 202-4, 206, 281, 309, 371, 378, 379, 383, 387, 400

Neurath, Herr von, 212
Nicolle, M., 211

Ormesson, M. d', of the *Figaro*, 174
Otto, Prince, 212

Painlevé, Paul, 26
Paganon, M., 195
Pannetier, Odette, Mlle, 102
Papen, Herr von, 35-7
Parquet, M., 49
Pasionaria, La, 382-5
Patenôtre, M., 143
Paul-Boncour, 42, 202
Paul, Prince, of Jugoslavia, 212
Pavelich, Ante, 99
Péret, Raoul, 26
Péri, M., 202
Pernod, M., 95
Pertinax, of the *Echo de Paris*, 31, 172, 174, 177, 180
Pétain, Marshal, 65, 83, 95, 273
Peterson, M., 179
Pfeiffer, M., 165
Pfordt, Fritz, 111, 117, 119, 120
Piétri, M., 65, 95, 149, 150, 225
Pilsudski, Marshal, 99, 169
Piot, Lieut. Jean, 21, 22
Pirro, Herr, 108
Pivert, Marceau, 62, 132, 156, 280, 287
Poincaré, Raymond, 21-8, 30, 32, 34, 66, 210, 266, 278, 279
Poncet, François, 227
Pressard, M., 49, 68, 69, 395
Prince, M., 68-9, 83
Proust, Marcel, 276

Queen Victoria, 82

Racamond, M., 284
Ramadier, M., 290
Ramette, 147, 155, 194
Rappoport, Charles, 314
Régnier, M., 95, 151, 183, 283
Renard, Jules, 277, 278
Renaudel, M., 280
Renault, M., 296-9, 304, 307, 310, 322
Reynaldy, M., 49
Reynaud, Paul, 79, 143-5, 194, 205, 316, 330, 331
Ribbentrop, Herr von, 99, 104, 122
Ridz-Smigly, 405
Rivet, Professor, 155, 162
Riviere, André, 290
Rivollet, M., 65
Robey, George, 228
Rochefoucauld, Stanislas de la, 105, 107
Rocque, Col. de la, 53, 57, 70, 72, 73, *and footnote*, 74, 91, 93, 97, 98, 150, 158-61, 165-7, 182, 185, 186, 195-7, *and footnote*, 198-200, 232, 233, 242, 243, 251, 273, 298, 308, 309, 352-5, 358-62, 364-5, 367-9
Rohde, 118
Rollin, M., 83
Rossé, M., 215, 263, 265
Rotée, Inspector, 55

Roy, Roger, 393
Rucart, M., 161, 194, 290

Sabiani, M., 367, 368-9
Saint-Quentin, M. de, 179
Salengro, Roger, 177 *footnote*, 290, 303, 315, 325, 337, 361, 391-6, 398
Saltykov, 230
Saposs, D. J., 321 *footnote*
Sarraut, Albert, 45, 46, 64, 69, 83, 210-2, 214, 228, 231, 259, 275, 281, 380
Sarraut, Maurice, 210
Schacht, Dr., 374
Scott, David, 278
Sellier, M., 290
Sembat, Marcel, 278
Sennep, the cartoonist, 31, 281
Sheean, Vincent, 138
Silbert, Albert, 225
Simon, Jules, 86
Simon, Sir John, 82 *footnote*, 128, 129, 132-7, 177
Sion, M., 241-2
Smuts, General, 229
Soliman the Magnificent, 215
Spahn, Martin, 264
Spinasse, M., 216, 290
Stalin, 132, 140, 154
Starhemberg, 212
Stavisky, 47-9, 51 *footnote*, 67, 68, 394
Steed, Wickham, 25, 27
Stresemann, 27, 30, 31, 222, 223
Sturmel, M., 263, 265
Suvitch, 133, 135

Tabouis, Mme, 174, 180
Taittinger, M., 195, 199, 200, 215, 359
Tannery, M., 97
Tardieu, M., 32, 35-9, *and footnote*, 40, 42, 65, 75, 81, 83, 84-6, 94, 149, 192, 221, 272, 395
Tasso, M., 290
Tastes, de, M., 53
Tessan, M. de, 289
Thellier, M., 211
Thérive, André, 189
Thibaud, M., 241, 247
Thiers, Adolphe Louis, 341
Thomé, M., 51
Thompson, Sir Basil, 69
Thorez, Maurice, 56, 161-4, 167, 197, 199, 238, 239, 285, 286, 311, 360, 363, 389, 402
Torrès, M., 213, 215
Treves, Archbishop of, 111
Trotsky, 293, 294, 300, 319

Vallat, Xavier, 195, 215, 318
Verlhomme, M., 392
Victor Emmanuel III of Italy, 176
Vienot, Pierre, 290
Violette, M., 289
Voigt, F. A., 121

Wagner, Gauleiter, 229
Waldeck-Rousseau, Pierre, 63, 94
Webster, Tom, 281
Weill, Georges, 262, 263 *footnote*, 266 *footnote*
Wendel, M. de, 144, 267
Wensley, Inspector, 69
Weygand, General, 23, 214
Wilson, President, 221

Ybarnégaray, M., 50, 196-9, 361

Zay, Jean, 208, 290
Zinoviev, 403
Zyromsky, M., 62, 156, 157, 280, 287, 313, 379